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**THE
SEA CAPTAIN**

H. C. BAILEY

FICTION



THE SEA CAPTAIN

BY

H. C. BAILEY



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THE SEA CAPTAIN

CHAPTER I

SILLY SHEPHERD

THERE is a portrait of him. The Elizabethan artist, as usual, makes him without complexion and very respectable. But I do not believe in that. He is a lean, lumbering weight of a man. His brow would be too big for his head if he had not such a mass of jaw. Under the shade of the brow there is a stabbing grey glint of uncommon eyes. There he sits with hands prosperously folded, prosperously ordinary in his white ruff and black velvet and gold chain. There's his wife, sedate in the placid beauty of her St. Martin's summer, tender and gentle and pure. But—but she has a smile. I protest he was not respectable. Hear how he began.

He earned, I suppose, by the year, two angels—say a pound—with all the mutton and beer he could swallow, with grey frieze enough to keep him warm in no stockings, with a mat of rushes and a log by the kitchen fire to make him bed and pillow when he slept indoors. He was a Berkshire shepherd when Mary, who burnt the heretics, was Queen. He had no name but Dick, like his father the swineherd before him. The maids called him "silly shepherd" because they found him a heavy lout and dull.

People who like the luscious, people who want the grand style, I have heard them call it a hulking country. The masses of the downs are blunt and bluff, often like a hog's back, often like a ploughman's shoulders, and sometimes they have no sharper colour. They can give you large prospects in a quiet harmony, which to some folks breathes of peace. But to me their spirit seems combatant. From the sarsen stones in the vale where the men who were before history worshipped life and death, past the turfed ramparts of the bronze swords and the barrows of Saxon and Dane, to the wind-battered beeches on the summit line, the bold scarps rise proclaiming stubborn strength and endurance.

Close upon Assynton village the downs stand bluff and grey.

The murmur and light of a swift stream are about its church, and there only the rolling acres of bare land allow a press of trees. From the old manor house—what's left of it now is a barn—Mistress Mary Rymingtowne was pleased to come and walk there.

She was a child of fifteen, but girls were swiftly women in her day. From her bearing you might have guessed her father emperor of the world, not merely lord of a decent Berkshire manor. Her face was ivory pale and thin. She was tall and of a long-limbed grace. She had about her a rare delicacy, as of a creature aloof from all things ugly or unclean. So you see her coming, a daintily haughty child, straight and slight in her silver-blue dress.

She heard heavy steps, and turned to look. The silly shepherd, loose-limbed and bent, was shambling after her. His heavy face gave no sign of sense. His head rolled to and fro. On a sudden she checked and stood still and drew aside, waiting for him to pass. But Dick, the shepherd, stopped too and lounged against a tree, and plucked grass and began to chew it. After a moment she turned to look for him, and saw him so at his ease, staring. With her broad brow puckered she swept down upon him:

"What art doing, sirrah?"

He spat out his grass carefully. He put a big finger to his forehead.

"Nought, nought," he drawled, and began to scratch his shoulder against the tree; but he did not remove the steady, curious state of his dull grey eyes.

"I do not desire to have you gape at me," she cried.

Whereat he did gape. With the fall of the big jaw, he was all stupid surprise.

She exclaimed at him. She swept past him and back the way she had come. Then the shepherd gathered himself together and slouched after her. As he watched the quick, lithe body his shadowed eyes were fierce.

A speculative person who had seen it might have guessed the absurd reason why he prowled often about Mary Rymingtowne. But when people were there to see there was nothing to be seen in the silly shepherd.

The child heard his heavy steps again, and hated the instinct that bade her be afraid, and hurried on. So they came at speed towards the church, the dainty child with a heavy lout shambling fast on her track.

It was an ugly sight. It startled the pious features of a black-

gowned priest coming from his prayers, and he stood still to watch. You are introduced to the child's cousin, the rector of the parish, called, after the respectful fashion of the time, Sir Ralph Rymingtowne. He was large and plump, and vivacious eyes made his smug, full face look like a mask. As the child came up, she slackened speed, crying breathless:

"Good morrow, Sir Ralph!"

He turned to walk with her.

"You are in a heat, Mary."

"I hate that shepherd," she panted. "I will have him whipped—only my father will never whip any one."

"Your father's gentleness should be an example to us all," said the priest demurely. "What has the shepherd done?"

"He—he—he prowls," she exploded. "He is always about me. And I hate his wooden face."

"Pho, child, the poor lad means no ill! 'Tis the purest simpleton. But I will school him." Sir Ralph turned and hailed. "Diccon lad! Away with you! Hie you back to the farm."

The shepherd stared and stood still and put up a forefinger.

"I will give you company home, Mary. But I do not like to see you thus timid. Diccon is meek as a lamb."

She tossed her head. A red spot burnt on her cheek. Sir Ralph paced placidly beside her, talking smooth morality. She broke into the midst of it with a cry:

"I knew! Oh, he is a masterless rogue!"

She turned and pointed. The shepherd was shambling close behind them still.

Sir Ralph frowned.

"The poor lad hath but half his wits," he explained, and called out: "Come hither, sirrah." The silly shepherd slouched up and stood limp and bent, staring. "Sirrah, I bade thee away."

"I thought as you was a-wanting to speak to me," the shepherd drawled.

Sir Ralph burst out laughing at so fatuous an answer.

"Faith, the fellow is all but idiot," he confided to Mary. Then, "Look thee, Diccon, if I wanted speech with thee I should not drive thee off. So!"

The heavy face was twisted into a cunning smile.

"Eh, but there's reasons," the shepherd nodded and winked. "We knows each other for sure."

"Oh, oh! I leave you to your friend, Sir Ralph!" the child cried fiercely and sped away.

Sir Ralph gave the shepherd a glance like a blow, and turned and called after her. She did not stop. He turned back angrily with a growl:

"Hast no wit at all in thy chuckle head?"

The shepherd giggled stupidly.

"If I had, you'd have no use for me, master."

Sir Ralph frowned at him a moment; then, with a mutter of "Follow," led the way towards a dark copse. On the way he talked over his shoulder:

"Why must you show Mistress Mary you are my man?"

"Bless me, why not now?" the shepherd cried. They faced each other in the shade of the hazels. "And, besides, I thought you was a-making up to her, and she as sweet as you please. Might ha' been a-courting, you might."

"Go to, fool! I am a priest."

The shepherd giggled again.

"So you be, for sure. And can't have never a wife. That's a pity, too that is."

Sir Ralph demanded truculently what he meant, and could get nothing out of him but a stupid leer. Sir Ralph reviled him for a grinning jackass.

The shepherd scratched his head.

"Mother Meg Blackavice said as you had some'ut to say. Be that all of it?"

Sir Ralph controlled himself.

"Have you forgot what I said to you a month since, Diccon?"

"Oh dear, oh dear, that I ha' not!" the shepherd cried.

"Why, you was to give me five gold pound when Squire Gabriel dies and you be lord of the manor."

Sir Ralph came nearer.

"Well, Dick, well?"

"Well, I hope a will die soon, to be sure," the shepherd giggled.

Sir Ralph laid his hand on the heavy shoulder.

"Diccon lad, why is he not dead? When he walks alone on the down by night, star-gazing, is there no chalk-pit that would break his neck, or no dew-pond where he could drown?"

The shepherd gaped and stared, and then:

"There—there!" he quavered, "I was afeared you meant me to stick un," and all his big frame began to shiver and shake.

"Why, what has given you the palsy?"

"Oh, but he's a ready man is Squire Gabriel, and a man of his hands, and a soldier man he was. And he is a conjuror, too, and a hath devils and sprites."

"Therefore is he the enemy of every Christian man," said Sir Ralph piously. The shepherd crossed himself in a hurry and stood gaping. "Look you, Diccon. They tell me he goes up o' nights to the old windmill, to the chamber he hath made himself there, to work his magic and conjure with the stars."

"And so a doth," the shepherd cried. "I ha' seen him catching star magic in a pipe."

"Why, then, from the manor to the down he must cross the Kennet by the plank bridge. What's easier for a bold fellow who would be rich than to shift the mid planks o' some dark night?"

The shepherd drew back. His heavy face was contorted with coarse cunning.

"You 'm minded to do such, Sir Ralph?" he asked.

"I see a way for a bold fellow that I know to come by five pounds. And there might be a crown or two in hand for him beside," the priest smiled genially. "And if he were careful to put back the planks—after—why, no man were ever the wiser."

The shepherd grinned and held out his hand.

Like that, if I have made anything of the masses of queer papers at Assynton Towers, Dick the shepherd began the profitable business of his life. They digress to a large description of Assynton Manor and Gabriel Rymingtowne, its lord. For the first, what matters to us is that it could be inherited only by males. Therefore, on Gabriel Rymingtowne's death it must pass not to his daughter Mary, but to his cousin the priest. You can sympathize now with the anxieties of Sir Ralph. You will see the reason why Gabriel Rymingtowne did not love him. Mr. Gabriel Rymingtowne, as I read the Assynton papers, hated no man, finding every one too comical. He had soldiered in Italy and brought back a very complete understanding of the ways of the world and a liking for astrology, alchemy, and Greek. Therefore he built for himself a library and laboratory in the old manor house and made an observatory out of the haunted windmill on the crest of the down.

It was as late as ten o'clock on the May night, and Assynton village had been long abed. There was no moon, but the stars were bright in a clear dark sky. From the gardens of the manor

house Mr. Gabriel Rymingtowne came crossing the home meadow to the river. He was slight and erect, light of foot for a man whose beard was white. He crossed the plank bridge and took the upward path. When he was out of sight round the shoulder of the down the shepherd came from the hazel copse. For a little while he was on the middle of the bridge, on hands and knees, looming in the dark like a huge uncouth beast. A gap yawned over the swift eddying water, there was a dull clatter of wood, and the planks were set to yield to the first step. He rose and tried them with his foot, then turned and followed Mr. Rymingtowne. And now, for all his clumsy bulk, he moved very quickly and without a sound.

Flat on his stomach on the close turf of the down, he looked up at the windmill. The sails of it were gone, and it stood a bare tower. Mr. Rymingtowne had put a flat roof on it, and there he sat, a cloaked, shapeless figure in the dark, his telescope pointed at the red gleam of Mars. The shepherd plucked a sprig of thyme to chew, and composed himself for waiting.

Midnight had sounded from the church in the valley before Mr. Rymingtowne came back to earth and went homeward. The shepherd lay still and waited a while before he followed. As they went down the steep path the shepherd's clumsy feet sent a flint bouncing on ahead. Mr. Rymingtowne turned and cried out:

"Who goes there?"

The shepherd jumped aside, fell on hands and knees, and tried to hide among the little juniper bushes. He made much noise. He was very heavily visible. He obtruded himself upon the senses, improbable and monstrous.

Mr. Rymingtowne was interested, attracted, and came placidly up the hill again. The amorphous beast in the bushes revealed a comprehensive outline. Mr. Rymingtowne delivered a kick where it was invited. A ridiculous grunt repaid him. The shepherd staggered to his feet, rubbing the damaged part. "It's a pleasure to see you, sir," said Mr. Rymingtowne. "But why should I?"

The shepherd, with one hand guarding his rear, with the other pulling his forelock, retired backwards.

"Be a-looking for a strayed ewe," he muttered.

"Do they nest in the junipers?" said Mr. Rymingtowne pleasantly. "Sir, am I like a ewe?"

"No, if it please God," the shepherd said humbly. "Being as you've a beard."

Mr. Rymingtowne took him by the shoulder, and as he wriggled away took him by the ear.

"Diccon, my friend, you are magnificently a fool. And is it possible that you think I am? Do me the honour to walk with me." By the ear he led the shepherd on, and rebuked a whine of pain with: "Hush, hush! I know that you yearn for my company. In fact, Diccon, you are but too interested in me and my family. My daughter," he took a firmer grip of the ear—"my daughter complains that you prowl after her. Now, I resent that."

"I never done her no harm," the shepherd whined.

"My friend"—Mr. Rymingtowne's voice was more genial than ever—"if you did, there would be one shepherd the less in Assynton." He twisted the ear and took the shepherd down the hill faster. "But you puzzle me, and I do not like it. First, you prowl after her, and then you prowl after me. Why?"

"You ha' been a-talking to Sir Ralph, now," the shepherd complained.

Mr. Rymingtowne was naturally surprised.

"Sir Ralph? Why, what's my good cousin to do with this?"

"A said I was idiot. A said it before Mistress Mary," the shepherd complained. "And, if I be a fool, why I would not have it spoke of neither."

Mr. Rymingtowne laughed.

"At last I find a modest man. But why did he call thee idiot, Diccon?"

The shepherd gave a queer, grumbling snigger.

"Being as I was more a fool than he needed, belike—or not so much. What's a fool, to be sure? 'Tis a fox that goes to ground."

He muttered to himself and edged away. They were down upon level ground and drew near the bridge.

Mr. Rymingtowne went on laughing.

"Why, sir, you philosophize. But I think you do not explain why you prowl."

The shepherd jerked himself free, crying:

"No, no! I will not go over the bridge."

Mr. Rymingtowne, with an Italian exclamation, snatched his ear again:

"Sir, you are a very treasury of mysteries. And why, so please your worship, will you not go over the bridge?"

"I'm a poor Christian," the shepherd whined, and crossed himself.

"I believe you a very poor Christian," Mr. Rymingtowne agreed, and peered at his face through the gloom. "Do you think the bridge leads to—heaven?"

The shepherd began to shiver.

"No, no, no," his teeth chattered. "You'm a conjuror, and I will not go over the bridge."

"Sir, you deceive yourself," said Mr. Rymingtowne sternly, and took him firmly by the ear and hauled him on to the planks. "It is very likely that you deceive me. Nevertheless——"

And he continued to haul. So they proceeded across the bridge, the shepherd shuffling, and hanging back, and squealing, and clasping anguished hands about the hand that held his ear.

When they came close to the pier on which the mid planks hung perilous, the shepherd, gripping Mr. Rymingtowne's hand, flung all his weight back and checked. There was a moment of sway and struggle. Then the shepherd's clumsy feet dislodged the planks. They slipped and fell with a splash. The two men drew back together from the swift, eddying water.

Mr. Rymingtowne kept his hold of the ear.

"Ah! So you did not altogether deceive me, my friend!" he said quietly. "And how did you know that the bridge had been made ready for me to cross?"

"Oh dear! oh dear!" the shepherd whined, "Sir Ralph said as I was idiot."

"Sir Ralph?" Mr. Rymingtowne repeated. For the first time something of anger came into his voice. "Ay, and I think Sir Ralph will say that if you were not an idiot you had never blundered into my hands and blundered into warning me."

"Dearie me!" said the shepherd sadly. "And so it is, to be sure; and an idiot I be, or I would not have let you lead me by the ear"—suddenly he freed himself—"or ever let you find me when I was a-hiding, neither."

As he spoke he sped away with hardly a sound of footfall, and was lost in the dark.

He was too sudden, too swift for Mr. Rymingtowne, who, after a futile spring at him, stood still staring. It was some time before Mr. Rymingtowne walked slowly back down-stream to the bridge in the village. He was gay with thought. He found the shepherd interesting.

He had often looked in the eyes of death. On the peril escaped he wasted little thought. He had no doubt that he was in debt to Sir Ralph. Who but his reverend cousin could gain anything by killing him? Sir Ralph's part was plain enough—as plain as that there was no proof against him. For what proof of anything in a loose plank? So of Sir Ralph Mr. Rymingtowne's mind made short work. He always expected little good of priests, and he had seen too much of life in Italy to be excited by any villainy. But the shepherd entertained him. Either the lad was a very sublime fool, or—or he was beyond understanding. But if he were a fool, how had he managed so neat an escape at the first moment he chose? And if he were not a fool, what in the world was he at? The more Mr. Rymingtowne thought, the more he was delighted by enigmas. He went to sleep upon them.

CHAPTER II

BLACK MAGIC

EARLY in the morning Sir Ralph was up. The piety of his temper compelled him to go sing matins before he attended to business. It is instructive to imagine his sensations as he knelt in prayer. From the church he hurried breathless up the river bank. Sure enough, there in the middle of the bridge the planks were gone. He peered down into the clear grey-green water with hope and horror. He was disappointed.

Thereafter he felt faint and sought his rectory for food and drink. He could not eat, but a long draught of double ale stopped his shivering. Also it excited him, so that he must needs find out at once whether his man was dead or no. He hurried away to the manor house.

As he came round the yew hedge of the herb garden he met Mr. Rymingtowne face to face. He started back fairly into the hedge, clutching at it with nervous hands. He flushed purple, and his veins knotted in his temples. Mr. Rymingtowne laughed genially. But in a moment the priest had command of his voice, if not his complexion.

"God bless thee with a good day!" he said kindly.

"Well done!" Mr. Rymingtowne applauded. "Piety should ever bear ill luck bravely!"

The priest had quite recovered himself. He put on a puzzled frown. "Your jests are too cunning for me, cousin."

"Why, would you have a ghost talk plainly?"

"Ghost?" the priest echoed.

Mr. Rymingtowne made a clutch at his shoulder.

"Will you make oath I am flesh and blood?" he said in a hollow voice.

"Are you mad?" Sir Ralph cried, and started away.

Mr. Rymingtowne laughed.

"Cousin, you have ever amused me. But never so much as now that you are a murderer."

"Mr. Rymingtowne!" the priest exclaimed with dignity. "Sir, you exceed the licence of a jest. You wrong not me, but the whole Church. This is blasphemy."

"Oh, brave!" Mr. Rymingtowne laughed. And then, with a sudden ferocity: "Man, look at your hands!" The priest started and glanced nervously this way and that. "Good cousin, a man of your superstitions will never enjoy his murders. Therefore in charity I'll not let you consummate mine."

He turned on his heel.

Sir Ralph cried out, "I protest you are mad!" and as the back contemptuously receded: "Sir, it does not become my office to listen to such insolence." Then he departed with much magnificence of gait.

Mr. Rymingtowne went smiling to breakfast and his daughter.

"Mary," said he, "you will not walk the garden unless I am with you."

The child's broad brow frowned.

"Because of the shepherd?" she asked angrily. "I hate him."

"Of course," said Mr. Rymingtowne, and considered her with grave interest.

The shepherd's flock was on the lower slopes of the down watched by his dog. The shepherd lay in the scanty shade of a gnarled old blackthorn, and Sir Ralph, as he saw him from afar, fancied that he had a book under his nose. But it was impossible that the silly shepherd should know how to read; and, indeed, when Sir Ralph came up there was no sign of his studying anything but bread-and-cheese.

The shepherd grinned broadly with his mouth full.

"Have 'e brought my five pounds?" said he.

"Sirrah, what befell last night?" the priest snapped.

The shepherd laughed.

"They planks was loosed. Squire, he come down in the dark. There was a gurt splash, there was. And you do owe a poor boy five pound."

"Fool, the man is alive and well!"

The shepherd's face was contorted with fear. He crossed himself again and again and shivered.

"That is witchcraft, that is," he mumbled. "I told 'e was a gurt conjuror. That is black witchcraft, to be sure. Oh dear! oh dear! his devils will be riding of I," and he rolled on the turf and writhed.

A moment Sir Ralph stood over him, watching with alarm not wholly contemptuous. Then he turned and walked slowly away. The silly shepherd had provided him with an idea.

Withcraft was felony. Nay, it was close akin to heresy, and might well be taken for heresy when the man who practised it was of free thought and speech. The bishops were very zealous after heretics. All across England the fires were glowing. A man could win favour and place by finding fresh victims. And what victim would burn more justly than Mr. Rymingtowne with his magic of alchemy and astrology, and his mockery of Holy Church? It was the sacred duty of a faithful priest to send him to the stake. With joyous excitement Sir Ralph beheld the law of man and God arranging the death that he needed.

In the golden twilight of a showery day two men rode up to the rectory. They were soberly, sombrely dressed, and so much alike that the younger seemed to be wearing the older's old clothes. The elder was a heavy man with a keen tired face, the younger slim and stolid. Sir Ralph hurried out to meet them, and was greeted with precise formality:

"I am Dr. Oscott, the bishop's commissioner. My secretary, Thomas Saunders."

Sir Ralph was much honoured, and welcomed them effusively into his parlour. Dr. Oscott fell wearily into a chair and looked Sir Ralph over. Mr. Saunders sat on the edge of a stool and stared at the hangings of faded red and green.

"His lordship commends your zeal, Sir Ralph. It is of high import that the lurking enemies of the faith should be sought out and destroyed. One heretic in secret may do more harm than twenty bold professors. Therefore my lord thanks you."

Sir Ralph was eloquently grateful, and pressed upon them

generous entertainment. They ate and drank like gentlemen who found good appetite in heretic-hunting. Not till they were full and content did Sir Ralph approach his business.

He expounded vigorously the iniquities of Mr. Rymingtowne: how he practised white magic and black; how he had built himself secret places in which to conceal his ugly mysteries; how all the people cowered before him as a man of more than human power; and how he used his ascendancy to make them heretics by ever casting scorn on the Catholic faith and Holy Church.

"Such a man is of all infidels most dangerous and devilish," said Dr. Oscott, and looked at his secretary.

"I think this man is his reverence's cousin?" said Mr. Saunders meekly.

"Therefore I have hesitated long to inform against him. Perhaps too long. And now it is with a heavy heart."

"Your words, sir, do you honour," said Dr. Oscott.

Sir Ralph bowed.

"Even while we speak he is to be seen in his observatory seeking magical aid of the stars."

"I might, perhaps, see him, sir." Mr. Saunders rose.

"Nay, gentlemen, but I fear you are too weary. On another night were better. I——"

"We will go," Dr. Oscott said.

Sir Ralph led them on to the down, not without anxieties. Mr. Rymingtowne might choose that night to stay at home. Such callousness was in his character. But a light twinkled from the windmill. As they came up they saw a man move between them and the pale crescent of the new moon. Mr. Rymingtowne was on the roof with his telescope.

"So"—Sir Ralph pointed and whispered—"so he will sit with his magic glass, and then go in and all night through work out his spells by what it hath shown him."

Dr. Oscott peered up at the motionless astrologer.

"I like it not when a man would see more than is granted to men's eyes," he said severely.

Sir Ralph shook his head sadly.

"The very spirit of Satan."

"Oh dear, oh dear, you make me crawl all over!" The whine seemed to come out of the ground. The good gentlemen started aside, to see the silly shepherd heave up his ungainly bulk. "Oh, you shouldn't, you shouldn't! and me just dreaming of rabbit pie and all!"

Sir Ralph explained in rapid understones.

"A shepherd lad, a very simple honest fellow. If you would know how the man is feared, no better witness."

Dr. Oscott nodded. "Come, my lad, why so frightened?"

The shepherd gaped.

"Why now, I ben't sure what his reverence be wanting me to say."

"The truth," said Mr. Saunders.

"Speak out, Diccon lad. What does Mr. Rymingtowne do there?"

The shepherd gaped.

"I dunno."

"Nay, then, why do you fear him?"

"Aw, Sir Ralph, you know that, to be sure."

"Come, my lad, tell us," Dr. Oscott insisted.

"Why, Sir Ralph here wants to be rid of him."

Mr. Saunders, the stolid secretary, put his hand on his master's arm. There was a moment's silence. Then Sir Ralph cried angrily:

"Come, sirrah, what was it you said to me of magic and the devils?"

"Magical devils?" the shepherd drawled stupidly. "Devils, says you to I?"

"Beshrew thee for a fool!" cried Sir Ralph. "Come, gentlemen, the poor lad is dazed! But you have seen." He waved his hand at the astrologer.

"Quite," said Mr. Saunders. They went back to the rectory, and Sir Ralph was voluble.

Now, when they were gone, the shepherd lay down again and, with his chin on his hands, chewing a scrap of thyme, waited wakeful till Mr. Rymingtowne came down the hill homeward, stout stick in hand, sword at side. In a little while the silly shepherd rose up and made for the windmill. The door was on the latch—there were no locks on Assynton doors then—he entered and climbed the ladder to the upper room, moving in the dark with an assured ease that proved him no stranger there. He put his hand on the tinder-box and lit a candle. In a moment's glance he found papers covered with figures and signs. He stuffed them in his bosom, blew out the light and was gone, swift and adroit as he had come. Then he slept happily till dawn.

In the early morning he left his dog with his sheep and came

down the hill whistling merrily "Lady Greensleeves." From behind a hedge he watched Sir Ralph take the two strange gentlemen down to the church for matins. While they were gone he slipped into the hall of the rectory. He dropped two of his stolen papers by the table where the inkhorn stood. He thrust the rest into most obvious concealment among the books above.

Then he lounged down towards the church. The two strange gentlemen came out first and strolled up to the rectory while Sir Ralph was taking off his surplice. The shepherd waited for Sir Ralph.

Shambling, shuffling, grinning, plucking his forelock, he waited.

"What is it, sirrah? Hast found thy wits?"

"You'm cruel hard on a poor lad," the shepherd whined plaintively. "Oh dear, and if as you had not made me so afeard, I would ha' said whate'er your reverence pleased."

"I wanted you to say the truth," said Sir Ralph with dignity.

The shepherd stared at him with stupid, puzzled eyes.

"Oh, magic and devils!" he muttered. "Oh, but you shouldn't ask me. I be afeard. Take the gentlemen into the windmill for to see for themselves. Squire do never use to be there till two hour after sundown. You could go by twilight like I did, and none the wiser."

"What did you see, Diccon?"

"Oh dear, 'tis hideous indeed. There's glass and there's gold and all. And I took and ran."

Sir Ralph reflected. "Hideous with glass and gold"—that spelt black magic plainly enough. But he wanted more than magic. He wanted heresy.

"Hark thee, Diccon. Didst see any books there?"

The shepherd shook his head.

"No books, for sure. Only a mort of papers."

And again Sir Ralph reflected.

"Diccon lad, could you put some books there for me?"

The shepherd stared lack of understanding. It was repeated and explained—explained at last with a crown piece. The shepherd chuckled.

"Go on to the rectory, sirrah, and the cookmaid shall give thee breakfast."

Meanwhile Dr. Oscott and his secretary had come into the rectory hall to wait their host. The secretary, crossing to look

at Sir Ralph's books, saw before him those papers covered with strange figures, pentagons and pentagrams and cabalistic signs. He held them out to Dr. Oscott.

"It seems, sir, that our good Sir Ralph also does something in astrology." Dr. Oscott bent his brows upon them while Mr. Saunders pulled out the bundle of papers clumsily thrust among the books. "He would seem to have a great appetite for it," said Mr. Saunders, and held out these too.

Dr. Oscott turned them over.

"He goes something beyond me," he frowned.

Mr. Saunders agreed.

Sir Ralph came in, and his geniality was surprised by Dr. Oscott's questioning stare.

"You are yourself an astrologer, Sir Ralph?"

"I?" Sir Ralph stared. "Nay, God forbid!"

Dr. Oscott held out the papers.

"You keep these on your desk."

Sir Ralph turned them over with astonishment unfeigned.

"This is Mr. Rymington's hand!" he cried. "Why, gentlemen, here is such evidence of his ill-practice as we need."

Dr. Oscott and his secretary exchanged glances.

"How came the evidence here?" said Mr. Saunders.

"I profess I know no more than you." Sir Ralph was honestly amazed. "Unless—unless that silly shepherd——"

He left the room in a hurry.

"That shepherd," said Mr. Saunders, "seems to occur conveniently."

Sir Ralph found him on the kitchen settle with his nose deep in a tankard of double ale. Sir Ralph hauled him out spluttering.

"Rogue, what work were you at in my hall?" The shepherd gaped a dribbling mouth at him. "Those papers of my cousin's"—Sir Ralph tried to shake sense into him. "Come, sirrah, I know you must have brought them."

"Dearie me," the shepherd whined, "and me as thought you would like them."

"Like them! Beshrew thee for a fool! I like them well enough, but why i' God's name could you not tell me of them? Faith, thou art a marvellous ass. If thou does a good thing thou must needs turn it into a bad."

The shepherd began to whimper and sob grotesquely, so that Sir Ralph had much ado to soothe him. After a while he was persuaded, reluctant, to face the gentlemen and tell his tale, but

as soon as Sir Ralph had him at the door of the hall, as soon as he saw the grave faces within, he began to howl once more.

"Come, Diccon, come," Sir Ralph cried. "No harm's meant thee. Tell the gentlemen how the papers came here." Diccon sobbed and whimpered still. "Booby, speak out!"

The shepherd shrank away and trembled.

"Sir Ralph—Sir Ralph bids me say as I brought they papers," he gasped.

Mr. Saunders changed a glance with Dr. Oscott. "Where didst find them, my lad?" said he.

The shepherd looked at Sir Ralph for inspiration. Sir Ralph made an impatient gesture.

"In Squire's windmill," the shepherd cried in a hurry.

"But who bade thee seek them?" said Mr. Saunders sharply.

The shepherd shuffled back and gaped at him. In mute, stupid fear he made clumsy signs at Sir Ralph.

Sir Ralph laughed.

"'Tis an honest lad, gentlemen, but the dullest simpleton."

"I see that," Mr. Saunders said.

Sir Ralph waved the silly shepherd out.

Thereafter, at breakfast, he found the good gentlemen something reserved. It is probable that they were themselves not sure what they thought of him. Their natural desire to believe a priest and see heretics everywhere had been much impeded by the silly shepherd. Yet the priest was plausible and excellently devout. Moreover, if the mysterious papers were indeed Mr. Rymingtowne's, the priest was plainly right to charge him with magic. When the priest advised that they should visit the observatory and see for themselves what evidence of evil it held, they began to be pleased with him. Such a plan savoured of bold honesty. It agreed also with their official habits. Secret search of suspected houses was part of the regular order of the hunt for heresy.

The day they spent in talk here and there with countryfolk to discover how Mr. Rymingtowne was commonly regarded. They found him with a reputation for kindness and uncanny powers, and were the more inclined to believe in Sir Ralph.

He was in the best spirits. Some copies of the New Testament in English, seized from the pack of a wicked pedlar, he had thrust upon the shepherd and sworn him to get them into the windmill room before sunset. English Testaments among the tools of magic must be enough to send any man to the stake.

The morning was hot. The swift, grey-green river allured Mary Rymingtowne, who sat down among the king-cups and drew off her stockings. A shadow fell across her white legs. She clasped inadequate petticoats over them and looked up into the face of the silly shepherd.

"You'm no right to go wandering without your father," he drawled.

Her look was as fierce as a flogging, but did not disturb the shepherd, who continued to stare down at her legs with dull heavy curiosity.

She blushed richly, snatched at her stockings and shoes, sprang up and rushed away. She was so unfortunate as to miss one stocking. The shepherd stooped for it and, holding it at full length, slouched after her. They came upon Mr. Rymingtowne, benign under a tree with Theocritus.

"Father—this knave——" the girl began to explode.

The shepherd gave her the stocking and turned his back on her.

"I wants you, master," he drawled.

"Oh, sir, at your service," Mr. Rymingtowne laughed.

"What has the gentleman done, Mary?"

The girl was in a difficulty.

"He—he looked," she stammered and blushed painfully again.

Mr. Rymingtowne rose and, beckoning to the shepherd, walked down stream. Out of sight of the girl he turned.

"Understand me, sir. I'll not have you prowl and peep."

The silly shepherd stared. It is upon record that Mr. Rymingtowne saw something remarkable in his deep-set eyes.

"You'm a heretic," he drawled.

"Now God ha' mercy!" Mr. Rymingtowne burst out laughing.

"There be they as will burn you for such. Sir Ralph he hath got two catchpolls after you. 'Tis a Dr. Oscott and a Mr. Saunders. They'm minded to search your windmill to-night for the magic there. Do 'ee go and hide it before sunset if you ha' no mind to try a fire."

Mr. Rymingtowne was amazed into silence for a moment. For a moment the gleaming dark eyes of the silly shepherd stared into his. Then he found himself looking at nothing. The hazels were swaying behind the shepherd's back. Mr. Rymingtowne called after him in vain.

But he had told enough. Mr. Rymingtowne knew his world well enough to know that a taste for astrology might condemn a

man to death. That his cousin was zealous to procure his death he had seen. If Dr. Oscott were come to Assynton—Dr. Oscott, who had hunted heretics down all over the diocese—the danger was imminent. He knew how to act. In a moment he was climbing the down to the windmill. He saw his way. He would abolish all evidence of his science. He would let the good gentlemen come and search, and, when they had found nothing, break in upon them. It would be hard then if he could not make that fanatic doctor believe Sir Ralph a knave.

In the whirl of his own concerns he paused again and again to wonder at the silly shepherd. Who could have dreamed that the dull heavy lout had such a clear brain in him? Why had he chosen to hide it? Why was he pleased to reveal it now for the service of Mr. Rymingtowne? They were questions that could wait for an answer, but questions that insisted on being heard. And Mr. Rymingtowne would have found them more insistent if he had known all the plan on which the brain in that heavy head was working placidly.

Through the twilight Sir Ralph led his guests up to the windmill. They were in a good humour with him, having persuaded themselves that they were on the track of guilt. But, as they came to the door, the shepherd rose out of the ground, grinning and pulling his forelock, and Mr. Saunders, a suspicious mind, was disturbed. He did not understand why the shepherd had always to assist; and, moreover, it seemed to him that Sir Ralph made signs at the shepherd, and certainly the shepherd nodded and gave a silly laugh.

Sir Ralph opened the door.

"Oh dear, you'm bold, you'm bold," said the shepherd, and they came into darkness. Lanterns were lit, and they found themselves inside an empty shell of stone. The mill had been all dismantled. All the timbers were gone, and the stones and wheels. Only a ladder reached up through the darkness to the room beneath the roof. Sir Ralph began to climb, and the shepherd came last.

Before he was at the top he heard exclamations. When he came through the trap-door he found them hunting nervously about a room "bare as your hand." It had in it no more than two wooden chairs and a table, and on the table a little book.

Dr. Oscott turned flushing upon Sir Ralph.

"It seems you have deceived yourself, sir. At least, you have sought to deceive us."

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Sir Ralph, who was pale and unsteady, stammered out:

"I—I am amazed. The man is certainly a sorcerer. Perhaps this is sorcery. I——"

Mr. Saunders had been looking at the book on the table.

"Perhaps this is heresy?" he suggested, and held it out. It was a breviary printed at Rome.

Sir Ralph recoiled from it, saw the silly shepherd stand gaping and sprang at him. "What is this, knave? You told me the place——"

"No, no," the shepherd cried. "It was you as told I. You told I to——"

Sir Ralph struck him aside.

"Must you prate, rogue? Get you gone, I say," and tried to drive him to the ladder.

"What was he going to say?" said Mr. Saunders sharply.

Sir Ralph turned and forced a laugh.

"Oh, 'tis a dull fool. Come, gentlemen, I doubt we must search more cunningly. Doubtless there is some secret place."

He pointed them into the corners of the room and made a bustle of searching himself. At the worst he hoped for Testaments.

The shepherd began to whimper.

"You ha' come too soon," he whined.

Sir Ralph started round.

"What dost mean by that?" he cried. "Come, Diccon." He took the shepherd's arm and began to draw him aside. "The Testaments, lad," he whispered.

Mr. Saunders, who had been affecting an interest in the walls, laid a finger on Dr. Oscott and swung round.

"Certainly. What does he mean?" said he.

"And why do you whisper, sir?" Dr. Oscott cried, and advanced upon them.

The shepherd shuffled back whining:

"'Tiddn't my fault. I hadn't no time. You come too soon."

Sir Ralph cried out:

"Nay, doctor, 'tis an innocent, a natural. He knows not what he says. You must not heed him," and he made frenzied signs to the shepherd.

"I know not who is innocent, sir; nor why you fear the lad so," Dr. Oscott said sternly. "Come, lad, tell me the truth, and thou'lt have no harm. Why do you say we were too soon?"

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"Sir Ralph, he bade me put they little books here for you to find un," the shepherd whined. "And I hadn't no time."

"He is mad—he——" Sir Ralph screamed, and was checked by Mr. Saunders's hand heavy on his shoulder.

"You do not forget that you are your cousin's heir, sir," said Mr. Saunders, and Sir Ralph stared at him and muttered.

Dr. Oscott glanced aside and turned again to the shepherd.

"Sir Ralph bade you put books here for us to find. What books, my lad?"

"I ha' not stole they," the shepherd whined. "Here a be."

He fumbled in his bosom and plucked out the English Testaments.

With some wild cry Sir Ralph started forward to seize them. Mr. Saunders held him. Dr. Oscott opened the books, and one look was enough.

"So, sir, this is the mystery!" he cried. "You contrive false evidence to compass your cousin's death!"

"It is a lie," Sir Ralph screamed. "The fool is mad. He is possessed of the devil. You are mad to heed him. You are besotted. You——"

"Thou miserable knave!" Oscott advanced upon him white with a fanatic's anger.

Sir Ralph drew back, but screaming still, and as he drew back the shepherd thrust out a foot. Sir Ralph stumbled over it, staggered, and fell backwards through the trap-door down the dark shaft. There was a scream, and a thud, and silence.

"Oh dear, oh dear, you ha' killed un!" the shepherd cried.

The two gentlemen looked at one another and, gathering up their lanterns, began to descend the ladder. On the stones below they found only death.

As they knelt together, Mr. Rymingtowne opened the door. "Ods body," he cried. "What knaves are you? Hold up your lanthorns, sirrahs!" They stumbled to their feet and the lanterns' light revealed pallor and agitation. Behind them sideways the shepherd made for the door. Mr. Rymingtowne, who did not appear to see him, came forward. "Oh! Gentlemen, a hundred pardons," he bowed low. "I much fear you have found poor entertainment. I must have forgot that I had bidden you here." He saw Sir Ralph on the ground. "But I make no doubt my good cousin has done the honours for me nobly. Why? How now?" He bent over the body. . . .

"So! Pray which of you am I to charge with the holy man's death?" He did not look at the shepherd, who stole out swift and silent.

"Mr. Gabriel Rymingtowne?" Dr. Oscott stammered.

"You are a little late in knowing me."

"Sir, I give you joy on a great deliverance."

"Sir, you are very good. But I have a taste for delivering myself."

"Mr. Rymingtowne, the man who lies there was subtly and zealously your enemy. He sought to compass your death. He denounced you to us as heretic. He would have deceived us with false evidence against you. In the hope to suborn and fabricate it he brought us here. Now there he lies, stricken by the hand of God."

"I have your word for it," said Mr. Rymingtowne. "Yet perhaps you flatter me."

The two looked at each other. It was plain that they acknowledged his right to be haughty with them. "Let me tell my tale, sir," said Dr. Oscott.

"I think you have need."

"Give me leave, sir," said Dr. Oscott, and told who he was and all as it happened.

At the end Mr. Rymingtowne, who had listened without a sign, bowed gravely. "It is not for me to question Dr. Oscott's duty or his word. In some sort it seems I am your debtor, sir. Nevertheless, as the man was of my blood I must ask that you give me the story under your hand and seal."

"Your servant, sir," said Dr. Oscott.

They passed out into the night.

Where the shepherd spent it or how is no matter. He had shoes and stockings when Assynton saw him next day.

Mary Rymingtowne was walking all white in her rose garden. She turned by the sweetbrier hedge, to meet the shepherd face to face. She grew pale. "My father has sought you everywhere," she said in a low voice. The shepherd laughed. "He says that you—you are the strangest creature—Diccon, you——"

"Aw, you'm not to mind that," the shepherd said.

After a moment's silence she looked away from his deep-set eyes. "You must go speak with him," she said in a hurry.

"Nay, not I. I be going away," the shepherd laughed.

"Going away?" The pale face spoke wonder and something more.

"I could not be going before," he apologized. "You was not safe. Now 'tis all well."

Her breath came quickly, her face was white. "Why—why are you going away?"

The hulking body leaned towards her. He flung out his big hand and caught her by the throat and his fingers gripped into the bare flesh. The girl's bosom beat to and fro, there was fear in her blue eyes, but she did not resist him, her hands were clasped, she stayed quite still. "For to come back," he said, and was gone.

CHAPTER III

CAPTAIN DORICOT

HE was in a ditch at Fyfield eating cold bacon and onions when he decided to call himself Richard Rymingtowne. It's a proof of his confident vanity, to be sure, but no less of his relish for humour.

A man in the quest of his fortune is the stronger for a name of dignity. The silly shepherd had discovered that within the small world between Calne and Hungerford. By violence or guile or blatant importunity—I conceive him meditating them all—he was resolved to wring his fortune out of humanity. You wonder what made a shepherd ambitious. Of course he wanted trinkets to put into the lap of that long, pale-faced child at Assynton. Of course he wanted her on his knee and conceived it impossible unless that knee wore silk. In the matter of sex he was very simply a man. But certainly much more than sex impelled him to his venture. I suppose he found it dull to beat to and fro farm and down and market. He had an appetite for action. I have no doubt that he coveted rich living and soft lying. You can see that in his mouth. But most of all—this is in every line of his face and every word of his papers—most of all he wanted power, to command, to be a master of men, to order their wits and their strength. He might have done it in the grand manner, I think, he might have swayed great issues, but for all his ambition and all his greed the chalk downs held him in thrall. All the rest of the world in fee was no good bargain for the vale and the hills of Assynton. I suppose he could not conceive himself content in any other place.

So you may find reasons for his naming himself Rymingtowne. Since he had settled to annex the girl and her land in the end, he might as well have her name betimes. He had no fear of meeting any one beyond Calne who knew that his father had been merely Dick swineherd, and if he found any aware of that pale girl in the manor house it would be an entertainment for them to wonder what in the world he had to do with her.

He came into the alehouse at Avebury all wan with chalk dust, like a great ghost. You see him sprawling, loose-limbed, ungainly, on the black oak settle, while they put before him a quart jack of strong beer and a platter of beechwood laden with a pound or more of beef. He had to pay as much as twopence, for it was the year that Cranmer went to his death—a year of high prices. But Dick always was kind to his body.

While he ate and drank—his manners were tidy, but not beautiful—there came in a handsome fellow who called for sack. The alehouse kept no foreign liquors, and its hostess said so haughtily, and the handsome gentleman had to content himself with ale. Which he might have expected. And why, if he had a taste for sack, did he come to the alehouse? So Dick's mind communed with itself, while his large mouth ground down beef noisily. When he drank he looked round the tankard.

The gentleman had a handsome, feeble face, like a stained-glass saint, and golden hair that curled below his ears. He was in black velvet above his riding-boots, with a collar of silver lace. There were stains and frayed places that gave him an air of picturesque dilapidation. Dick wondered what might be the use of him to this world. The handsome gentleman had no interest in Dick. His whole intelligence was plainly devoted to expecting some one else.

A purple hat and a purple cloak swaggered in. From them emerged a lean little man, brown as a nut, with queer pale eyes. His doublet was purple slashed with gold, and purple his hose. He flung hat and cloak on Dick's table and himself on Dick's settle with a shrill: "Avoid thee, rustic!" as he wiped his boots on Dick's arm. Dick shrank humbly away and pulled his forelock, and took the rest of his beer at a gulp and shambled out. He heard the shrill voice demand double ale as he went.

But he had no intention of leaving them to themselves. Gentlemen so splendid would never be in an alehouse unless they had some queer business. If they wanted to be secret, there must be profit in them. And the little man pleased him.

They heard his heavy shuffle pass away down the street.

"*Basta*, a good sheep that!" said the little man, and drank.

They did not hear him turn off and circumnavigate the alehouse to come back again. Under the shed at the side he halted. He was out of sight from door or window, but through the unglazed lattice windows their voices came to him clear.

"Well, Tony, my bully," quoth the little man, "the thing marches. Old hunks hath sold his wool and now is pouching the gold."

"How much, sir?" Tony cried eagerly.

The little man reached up and tweaked his ear.

"Booby, what do I care? 'Tis but a sprat to catch our whale. Have you forgot your orders? Repeat them, sirrah!"

The handsome face was sulky.

"Jump out on him and crack his crown. When he comes to, swear that we have rid up just in time to drive off two brutal fellows who were robbing him."

The little man reached up and pulled the other's nose.

"Antonio, my Cupid, I'll teach thee to remember orders, if I have to carve them on thy skin. Where did I bid thee wait him, gosling?"

"By the withered oak under Cherhill down," Anthony muttered.

"So! Carry on, then. And if there's a blunder, my bully, I'll slit thy pretty nose to shreds. So here's to the venture and a full hold of the spices of Bengala!"

Dick heard them moving and departed swiftly. When they came from the alehouse yard with their horses he was in a shop, spending a halfpenny on whipcord. He saw a chance that it might be useful. The two gentlemen, it was plain, were going to waylay an old man with money on the road by Cherhill down, and Cherhill down was between Avebury and Calne. Towards Calne Dick made the best of his speed.

In a while he saw the little lean man before him, riding at an easy pace, and he checked and was careful not to be seen. But the handsome, dilapidated Tony was not to be seen either. So the two gentlemen had parted company. Dick directed his large ingenious brain to consider how they were to carry out their benevolent plan, and what was meant to be its issue. And his face was all stupid, and still more stupid, after its habit when thinking elaborately. They were to knock their man senseless,

and stand by him till he got his wits again, and then swear that they had saved him from naughty rogues.

The notion appeared to Dick delicately humorous, and therefore he looked more loutish than ever. But why not take the old fellow's money and have done with him? Plainly, because they hoped to get more out of him by posing as his saviours. These were gentlemen of large ideas. And what were they? Not the common rogues of the highway. Not gentlemen born either. They lacked the air, and their speech was queer. Mighty queer. What was that about "a full hold of the spices of Bengala"? It sounded like apothecaries' talk. But he did not conceive that little lean man an apothecary.

Dick plodded on three miles, always two turns of the road behind the little man, and they came over the shoulder of Cherhill down. There was the withered oak of the plan, a grim grey shape stretching skeleton arms. The little man jogged on slowly and still more slowly. Dick left the road and took to the down, using each fold of the ground with a shepherd's skill to hide him. He climbed high enough to watch the road for a mile back, and waited.

In a little while he saw Tony riding fast, an ominous black cavalier. But suddenly as he came by a break in the hill Tony vanished. He must be waiting his man there, half a mile short of the withered oak. The plan had gone awry. Dick's heavy face became of a lifeless stupidity. He saw the little man halt and look back again and again, and at last wrench his horse round and canter back to the oak. He was restless in the saddle. Dick could feel him swear.

The situation was altogether delightful. Dick chuckled and heaved himself up, and went swiftly on a course that led him across the hollow where Tony waited, and down to the high road beyond. But he halted behind a thorn.

You see the landscape: a white road through waves of turf with sparse, wind-blasted bushes and stunted trees, and to southward the grey-green swell of the down. There is no life in it but some sheep and three men expectant at their several stations. Another came into the picture—a pousy fellow on a bony cob. From his ditch Dick saw white hair and a red face with deep lines about the mouth. He came level with Tony unsuspecting. Tony broke out from the lane and drove a pistol butt down on his skull. He fell a shapeless heap on the road. His cob staggered and found its feet and cantered off. Tony was down

beside him fumbling in his clothes, plucked out a plump little leather bag, and sprang to the saddle again.

Dick understood. The dilapidated Tony was improving on his master's plan for his private good. Dick felt it capable of further improvement. Before Tony had mounted he had darted across the road and back again to his ditch. As Tony came galloping with the booty he was invisible. Invisible, too, against the white road was a double ply of whipcord knotted firm from tree to tree.

Tony's horse found it and came crashing down. Tony was hurled on, and met the ground with a thud that satisfied Dick, who came out of his ditch on the instant, rolled the limp heap over, and took from it the leather bag. This he put in his bosom, and careless whether Tony, now much more dilapidated, were dead or alive, he turned and made off. But before he went he untied his whipcord and rolled it into his pocket. He disliked waste. So he went on towards the old man who was robbed, and the little lean man, leaving Tony and Tony's horse lifeless upon the road.

Now, since this road was level and winding, and the little lean man was some way off the nearest of the two robberies, he saw neither of them, and his first chance of guessing at anything came when the old man's frightened cob broke into view. With a rolling Spanish oath he cursed Tony for a fool. He spurred forward, caught the cob and jerked it round, and made haste—the cob was neither willing nor speedy—to seek its master.

In the middle of the road the old man lay, plain enough. But Tony was not to be seen. Swearing with mellow eloquence, the little man rode on. He could not guess that the noise he heard faintly in the distance was the noise of Tony's fall. He was not yet sure what Tony had done, but the flow of his profanity was more than eloquent. However, he kept to his plan. He sprang down to help the victim, and tenderly was raising him when the victim sat up and stared and muttered:

"What is it? Where be I?"

"In parlous hap, save for my coming, good sir! Hath the villain wounded thee?"

The old man blinked narrow eyes at him.

"And who the fiend art thou?" he said sourly.

"Good sir, thank God for Captain Nicholas Doricot." He held out his hand to help the old man up.

But watching him with malign eyes, the old man began to feel in his pockets.

"Captain Nicholas Doricot," he repeated in a small, contemptuous voice. "I ha' been robbed, Captain Nicholas Doricot!"

"*Diavolo*, I feared it!" quoth Captain Doricot with a frown, and his pale eyes searched down the road after the vanished Tony. "If I had caught the knave!" he muttered, and there was no doubt of his honest anger. He stamped, and his brown face was pale. For the gosling Tony to dare cheat him and get well away was visibly intolerable to him. Then he commanded himself. "A most damnable vile rogue, sir!" he cried in his shrill voice. "And you may thank me he robbed you of no more than your purse. But for Captain Doricot, my friend, you were dead as salted herring."

"Thank you, quotha! No thank you!" the old man snarled. "Here's I get knocked o' the head and stripped, and find you standing over me to bid me thank you. I'll thank you for my money."

Captain Doricot kept his temper.

"Good father, when I hove in sight—'twas your cob coming past me with no man on him that made me turn back—when I hove in sight, there was a black fellow over you with a knife quick to slit your weasand. He fled before me—there is not many will abide Doricot's sword." He pulled it half out and slammed it back with an air. "Call me your salvation!"

The old man got on his feet.

"Salvation, to be sure! Where's my money?" said he.

"Now beshrew thee for a thankless soul!" cried Doricot with honest indignation. "Is money more to thee than life?"

The old man stared at him and sniffed.

At this moment Dick came plodding along. He did not seem to see them till he was close upon them. Then he gaped, but gaping shambled on his way.

"Here!" the old man called. "Where are you from?" Dick stood still and gaped at him. "Where are you from, my lad?" the old man repeated, coming towards him.

"Out o' Calne I be. And what be that to you, if you please?" Dick drawled.

"Calne? Have you met ever a man on the road?"

"You'm free with your questions," Dick grumbled.

"Come, good fellow," quoth Captain Doricot, "hath any man passed you o' horseback?"

Dick swung round and showed him a large gaping mouth.

"Now, my lad, speak out!" the old man cried. "Have you met ever a man on the road?"

"Oh dear, oh dear, and who'm you at all?" Dick opened dull, stubborn eyes.

"I am Job Hartop, of Coldarbour," the old man swelled. "Go to; answer me, fool!"

"And what was you asking?" Dick drawled, and when the question was vehemently repeated he scratched his head for a while. "I mind there was a man a-galloping a way back. Not so far neither, nor yet so near neither, as you might say."

"With a black cloak to him, good fellow?" cried Doricot.

"Ay, he was a black un, so he was! Do you know un?"

With a ferocious oath Captain Doricot consigned the dilapidated Tony to the devil. Mr. Job Hartop turned upon him.

"And prithee, what have you to swear about?" he said sourly. Captain Doricot struck an attitude.

"Remark me, Mr. Hartop! I am a man whose honour it is to achieve everything that I essay. I have here failed. I have saved only your life—less use, as you rightly conceive, than your money. Therefore I condemn myself. And if ever I find your black friend I will cut out his vitals for my consolation. *Diable de moinillon!* I have spoken!"

Dick stared at him and gave a stupid guffaw.

Captain Doricot sprang forward like a cat and pulled his nose.

"You laugh, good rustic—you laugh, I think! There's a joke fit for thy wits. *Via! Away!*" He swung round upon Mr. Hartop, who was glowering. "Come, sir, you are shaken. I will escort you to your door."

Mr. Hartop turned upon Dick, who stood blowing his nose.

"If I was your age, my lad, I would ha' knocked him down."

Dick guffawed again.

"Dearie me, 'tis too little a man for me to hit. I had a jackdaw to Assynton hopped and tweaked like he. I called un Shortlegs."

He pointed at the little lean shanks of Captain Doricot, who sprang to the saddle and sat there royally.

"The next time, rustic, thy nose will be slit," said he. "Come, Hartop, let us ride."

Mr. Hartop eyed him.

"Look you, Mr. Shortlegs, methinks the roads were safer

before you came," he said. "And I'll find them safest now if you ride before me."

"What, sir! Do you impute?" Captain Doricot walked his horse forward. "Do you insinuate? Speak plain, I entreat."

Mr. Hartop withdrew behind the bulk of Dick, who stood firm, grinning, swinging his ash staff.

"Go your ways," said Hartop nervously. "So they be not mine."

Captain Doricot laughed.

"Who knows, my Cræsus? All ways are Doricot's. If thou art wise in time and waking gratitude bids thee seek him, ride to 'The Bull' in Calne. To our meeting!"

He turned and spurred off.

Mr. Hartop stared after him, pale and dazed and muttering something. Then, turning, he plucked earnestly at Dick's sleeve.

"My good lad, my good lad, give me company to Coldarbour, and it shall be worth thy pains."

Dick laughed.

Mr. Hartop's cob was ready enough to go at a walk and, indeed, kept lagging behind. Mr. Hartop, with brief intervals, beat him importunately, and in that seemed to find consolation for his disaster and his anxieties. Once he spoke to Dick.

"That's a nasty little hornet of a man. Hadst ever seen him before, my lad?"

Dick's gaping face was answer enough. Mr. Hartop went on beating his cob.

It was the boyish nature of Dick to delight in playing providence, Nemesis, a punitive superintendent of humanity. The memory of the ingenious Tony's overthrow and the impotent ravings of Captain Doricot was very sweet. Of that grateful process, biting the biter, there could not be a more polished example. But perhaps he found still more satisfaction in Mr. Hartop, in Mr. Hartop's choosing for his protector against thieves the man who had the stolen money in his shirt. The successful thief guardian of the victim against the failures! Such humour was above all other species to Dick's taste.

In his capacity of Nemesis you suppose that he should have given the money back to Mr. Hartop. But this is too ingenuous. The idea of such formal, such pedantic honesty never occurred to his lucid mind. He was no slave of convention. The money was superficially Mr. Hartop's. But who would dare be sure that he had the best right to it? His manners were deplorable.

He commanded no confidence. The matter demanded investigation. Of all the rivals to that money-bag Dick much preferred the little Captain Doricot. He desired to know more of Captain Doricot, whose bearing suggested greater schemes than the bleeding of Mr. Hartop.

Coldarbour farmstead stood a mile or more out of Calne. Its barns and byres were tumbling down, and there was about it little signs of life or work. Plainly Mr. Hartop's farming was a matter of sheep and their wool. Dick frowned.

Why should a shepherd quarrel with a man for keeping sheep? In that reign tillage was everywhere yielding to pasture, corn to flocks. For the sake of the wool, common fields and common meadows were being stolen from the poor folk by yeomen and squire and peer. As the sheep conquered each mile more of land there was less work for man to do, less wage to earn, less bread to eat. The poor were so much the poorer, the rich so much the richer.

You conceive Dick glowering at the lifeless farmstead while his lack of love for Mr. Hartop froze into something harder.

As they turned into the yard a young woman came up quickly. She was handsome, in a dark full-blooded fashion, something too plump, like Mr. Hartop. She stared with her hand to her bosom. She seemed out of breath.

"Uncle—why—you—you be late, ben't you?" she stammered.

"You are a fool," Mr. Hartop snarled. "Take the cob in."

She grew pale and flushed, and tugged the cob off in a hurry.

Mr. Hartop turned to Dick and twisted his mouth into a smile.

"I'll not need you more, my good lad. Good-night to you!"

"Here, come now!" Dick cried. "Said as I should ha' some'ut for my pains, master."

Mr. Hartop's smile vanished.

"Come in, sirrah," he snarled, and led the way to the square stone house. In the big, bare kitchen the smallest of fires glowed. Mr. Hartop took a small mug to the beer-barrel and watched the trickling spigot with anxious care. "There's for you," he said, as though it were nectar.

Dick swallowed, and made a wry face and spat.

"I be robbing they pigs o' yourn," he said humbly, and put the mug down.

Mr. Hartop sneered.

"Thy stomach is too nice for me, sirrah. Take it away. Thou greedy knave!"

Dick gaped.

"I was going to tell 'e some'ut," he drawled. "Some'ut as you ought to know."

Mr. Hartop's face changed. He imagined something of his loss or Captain Doricot.

"What, then, my good lad?" he cried nervously. "Come, speak out!"

"Give I a shilling," Dick whined.

Mr. Hartop stared at him, and after much fumbling in his clothes pulled out a groat.

Dick snatched it.

"Y' ought to know you'm a stingy old hunks," he said with a grin.

Mr. Hartop struck at him and hit the door-post. Mr. Hartop called an oath after him.

Dick laughed as he crossed the yard. Then he looked at the groat and shook his head over it.

"You'm none so much to laugh at," he grumbled.

He was angry with Mr. Hartop for being no use to him. The knowledge that he had a bag of Mr. Hartop's money was in no way soothing, for he had come by that without Mr. Hartop's assistance. An ungrateful, stingy old hunks!

So he was lamenting his wrongs, when he saw Mr. Hartop's plump niece in an interesting position. She was by the side of the barn, out of sight from the house, and she stared eagerly, anxiously down the road towards Calne. She did not hear Dick's step till he was close upon her. Then she started more violently than was reasonable, and stared in a fright.

"Give 'e good-night, mistress," said Dick stolidly.

"You are going!" she cried. "Oh, are you going?"

"I ben't axed for to stay," Dick drawled.

"Why did he bring you? Where did you find him? Tell me! Has he been robbed?"

Dick gaped at her. From the house Mr. Hartop sounded petulant and angry.

"Tabitha! Lazy slut! Tabitha!"

She fled, and Dick shambled off.

CHAPTER IV

FLOATING THE VENTURE

As he went it was borne upon him that he had not done with Mr. Hartop yet. He trudged on towards Calne till he was well away from Coldarbour Farm. Then he turned aside, and under hedgerows made his way back, and sat himself down where, unseen, he commanded house and yard, and pulled out a cake of gingerbread. He had always a sweet tooth.

His unsentimental mind was giving Tabitha an ill name. She was, of course, too plump for him, and that made him suspicious. He set down against her a loose mouth and yearning eyes. But, for all that, he might have called her nothing worse than a baggage. He had felt something in her expression and her bearing that he condemned for noxious. You may wonder by what right he made himself a judge. But Dick always had his moralities.

What Tabitha's passions might demand interested him much. For, plainly, Tabitha had some business in hand. Why else should she watch the road and be anxious for his going? And perhaps Tabitha knew something more than she ought. Or why should she fancy that her uncle had been robbed? Dick chuckled soberly. The world was full of joy.

The sun sank in to a lake of gold. Down and vale grew vague in lavender twilight. Dick watched still, and once and again he saw Tabitha come out and peer down the road. But there was no one upon it. Light and colour faded. In a cloud-strewn sky the stars stood clear. For a little while a candle glimmered in the farmhouse. Dick saw it move from window to window, and heard the groan of bolts. Then all was dark silence. And still Dick watched.

In a little while he heard a horse coming from Avebury. It halted some way off. Then from near at hand Dick heard an owl hoot. He stole along the hedgerow. Close in the gloom of a patch of osiers a man stood waiting. His face was not to be seen, but he had the height and pose of the handsome dilapidated Tony. Dick grinned through the dark. He was just the man for Tabitha to choose.

A rustle and scurry, and Tabitha came. She flung herself upon the man and kissed him fiercely.

"My dearie, my dearie, and me half mad with fright! Oh, what's come to thee at all? Tony! Art not hurt?"

"Every bone in me is bruised. What's come to me? How do I know? What's come of old Hartop?"

"Why—why, but the old beast was caught? He's raging over his lost money, like the miserly old devil he is. Tony! Sure, the money's safe, dear lad?"

"Rot me if I know if my head be safe. I ha' been trapped, Tib." She clutched at him. "I had the old devil's bag, and was safe away—no sign of Doricot—and down goes my horse; and when I come to myself I have not a stiver upon me. Oh, I'll swear it's a trick of that fox Doricot."

Tony swore at him vehemently.

"The beast! The beast!" Tabitha sobbed and clung to him. They gave some time to grief and rage. Then Tabitha began to caress her man. "Tony, dear lad, let's begone. We'll not——"

"Begone, quotha!" cried Tony. "How can I take thee without a shilling? I have none, nor know where to turn for one, thanks to this pretty plan of thine. Would I had had the sense to stand by the captain! Never a man prospered by crossing him yet. Oh, he hath the fiend to his comrade! Who could——"

"Tony! Tony! There is a way yet. Oh, I hate thee for fearing that little foxy man. Dearie, thou art man enough for a dozen o' his make. And there is a way, my heart. The old miser hath plenty more. Why, there be five hundred pound to his strong box. Look 'e, now, my dear; wait a while till the old rat be a-sleeping—he hath but just gone to his bed, and he's fidgety. I'll draw the bolts and you may come in and master him. Then we'll away with more than we ever hoped, my dearie." She kissed him eagerly. "Why, Tony, I'll make thee rich as a lord. And if the old rat do get hurt, why, there be none will find him till the shepherds come down to the farm o' Saturday."

From the farmhouse came Mr. Hartop's peevish voice:

"Tabitha! Tabitha!"

Tony started back. The woman laughed.

"Never 'e fear, my dearie. He thinks I be down the yard. I told un I heard some'ut at the chickens. Wait now—wait awhile. He'll be snoring within the hour. I'll come to the door for 'e."

She scurried away.

A moment Dick lingered to see if the handsome Tony would

obey her and wait. Tony slunk away to his horse. But it was only to see that the beast was firmly tethered, and in a moment he came creeping back to the farm. Dick stole off.

There were, you see, many things which he might have done. What simple virtue demanded—to warn the wretched Hartop—was the only one which never occurred to him. He might, as in the morning, have waited till Tony had done his work, and then robbed the robber. But his morality boggled at that. He had, indeed, no more affection for Mr. Hartop than for a sheep whose carcass was to feed him; and yet, by the thought of the old man being butchered to help such a girl to such a lover, he was disgusted. The creatures were nasty.

But, if he had to meddle, he meant to help himself as well as damage them. And so he made for Calne at a run. He proposed to engage Captain Doricot in the affair. He wanted to know more of Captain Doricot. And even if there were no profit in him, it would be amusing to set him upon the dilapidated Tony. Dick was always liable to be governed by a desire for humour.

He looked a man who could not move quickly. He always arrived at need without haste. (These physical qualities still distinguish his family.) Not much time passed before you see him, warm indeed, but with plenty of breath, reconnoitring the 'Bull Inn.' It was possible that Captain Doricot, when he gave that address, had never meant to be found there. But if he were thus evasive, there was still time to get back and deal with Tony single-handed.

Dick liked the 'Bull's' kitchen. It blazed light from half a dozen candles, so that the shelves of crowded pewter flashed and shone. A gay fire crackled on the hearth, and from the spit which the melancholy little dog was turning a savoury smell spread wide. The rafters bore a notable harvest of hams and smoked beef and mutton, onions and dried herbs. Never was a place more genial to a stomach of large ambitions. But it held something that appealed to Dick's nobler parts.

Three or four good burgesses sat jolly over their mulled ale, rolling and nudging and chuckling as they listened to the intoxicating rhetoric of a certain shrill voice. For there, with the buxom, red-cheeked hostess on his knee—there sat Captain Doricot. Dick watched through the window a moment, and then stole round to the door.

What he heard was after this fashion:

"Now were we close upon the land whence Dan Paris of Troja

did steal Helena, which was the most beautiful woman that was ever, and lives still in Egypt, as they say. But that's heathen. I ha' seen the women of seven and fifty diverse nations, and kissed here and there, God wot! And before them all, give me my English sweetheart, round and sweet as an apple." He kissed the good hostess roundly, and there was laughter and the clinking of pots. "The galliot came close upon us, so that we could see the naked slaves chained to their oars, and the boatswain which walked among them and beat them. A hellish sight, being a heathen master of Christian men. But the knave's hour was at hand, for that his false prophet, Mahound, had tempted him to attack Nick Doricot. Whenas he sought to strike us amidships, I laid alongside him, and therewithal leaped upon his forecastle, where their fighting men are, and incontinent slew their captain, which was a Bassa, and, as they told me, ate glass to his dinner. My good lads, following me, laid so about them that in a half-hour of the Turks no man was left, and the slaves a-wailing to us, as we were God's angels. Now, look you, this galliot did stink so of sweet savours, that when the heat of the fight was past we were near fainting for too much delight of the fragrance. And in her we did find an hundred and three and thirty bags of clove and cinnamon and ginger and pepper, and what was more joyous than all, in a box of sandalwood a purse of cloth of silver, wherein was of rubies a full score. Ay, as large as your eyes, sweetheart, though not brighter. The which brought a twenty thousand pound to the merchant venturers which found the money for our voyage. *Diavolo!* He ventures wisely who ventures with Nick Doricot. When I sail next, I wager the *Toby*——"

Dick had heard enough. He knew his man now. He flung open the door and slouched in and stood gaping. The buxom hostess laughed at him.

"Well, my lord, what's your will?" quoth she.

Round her large comely shoulder appeared the lean brown face of Captain Doricot. His pale eyes flickered. Dick looked hard at him.

"Here's to the venture and a full hold of the spices of Bengala," he drawled. "And will 'e come now and cut his nose to shreds?"

There was amazement in the kitchen. But Captain Doricot kissed the hostess blandly and set her down on her feet.

"The good booby hath an errant to me, I think."

He strutted across the floor, caught Dick and swung him round, and with a kick despatched him through the door.

Outside in the dark Dick felt the lean hand cruel upon his arm. "You spy, do you, sirrah? You listen?" said Doricot. "When folks listen and spy, I am apt to make them dumb."

Dick chuckled.

"You'm a funny lad. You as would give your ears to know what I can tell."

Captain Doricot drew away from him and looked him up and down.

"*Madre Dios*, I begin to believe it's a man," quoth he. "Now what is your game, my lad?"

"That's more nor I know," Dick laughed. "But you'm wasting time to fumble after me. Now, I heard you and Tony smugface in the alehouse. I saw him knock the old man over and go off with the bag for hisself. I had half a mind for to give the old un the truth about you, but you was rare good sport, and when I took un home he had no more nor a mug o' small beer for I, so I told naught. Then, as I was coming away from his farm I see Tony smugface sneaking up, and I went behind the hedge. He stood away off and hooted, and the old un's niece sneaks out to un. She'm a bad piece. They was hugging and kissing and planning for to make an end o' the old un, and go off together with all his moneys. She'm to let Tony smugface in so soon as the old un's asleep." He paused and chuckled again. "I thought as 'twould pleasure you to speak a word with Tony."

Captain Doricot left him standing alone in the yard and came back with a horse.

"If you would see sport now, come hold by the stirrup!" he cried.

Dick laughed and ran. All the way Captain Doricot murmured to himself a gentle rhythm of strange oaths.

Before they were near the farmhouse Dick slid his hand to Doricot's thigh.

"Whoa, now—whoa!" said he. "The horse will scare un, maybe. Bide you here, and I will go on and see what they be a-doing."

Captain Doricot drew rein. Dick stole on through the dark.

The farmstead was grey in the gloom, with a glimmer of light from one curtained window. Where Tony had been lurking there was no Tony left. Dick crept to the house. A clattering and yell upon yell announced that Tony was about his business. Dick ran back to the road and whistled. Captain Doricot was upon

him in a moment. Together they made for the house again, and Captain Doricot laughed as he came.

The door stood open. The great kitchen was all dark save for a red glow from the hearth. Overhead sounded the noise of a scuffle and the voice of Mr. Hartop. The two fumbled their way to the stairs. Captain Doricot went up like a cat.

The bedroom of Mr. Hartop was in much disorder. It seemed all sheets and blankets and wrestling and yells. A moment Doricot stood in the doorway, smiling upon the scene. One glittering candle gave it light. In the midst, old Hartop, ridiculous in his bed-gown, wrapped himself about the dilapidated Tony, gripping and clinging with arms and legs. Tony writhed and staggered, clutching at him, trying to take him by the throat. The old man was a heavy burden, and had a desperate strength. Tony's drawn sword was caught between their limbs, impotent, or an equal danger to both. The old man screamed, and Tony gasped out oaths at him. Behind them, as they reeled, mad in hate and fear and ludicrous, Tabitha hovered. Through the noise she screamed her lover's name, and, darting in, plucked the dagger from his belt. She drew back. Her face was pale and vile with passion. She raised her hand to strike at the old man's back.

Captain Doricot strutted in, smiling.

"Fie, fie, my pretty!" he said, and caught her elbow in such a grip that she shrieked and let the dagger fall. He put his foot on it, and, reaching over Mr. Hartop's shoulder, flicked his fingers into Tony's eyes with a placid, "There, gosling, there!"

That, or the mere sight and sound of him, melted Tony's strength. Tony went staggering back, and fell with Mr. Hartop upon him. When Tabitha would have started to help him, her arms were seized from behind. She looked round to see Dick's heavy face grin at her.

Captain Doricot plucked out a lace handkerchief and dabbed delicately at his nose. Then he strutted across to the heap on the floor. Mr. Hartop, while he still dug his nails and knees into Tony, was turning an amazed face to stare. Captain Doricot put his foot on Tony's neck, and tapped Mr. Hartop's quivering shoulder.

"Mine ancient," said he, "you sweat. Get you to your blankets. Else will an ague rob the world of your charms. To your blankets, go. I will look to this rat."

Tony made no move to help himself. He lay gasping, and looked up at Captain Doricot with the eyes of a thrashed cur.

Hartop plucked his sword away from him, and with it helped himself to his feet.

"Murderous, thieving knave!" he panted, and broke out into a cruel laugh. "I'll see thee dance on the gallows for this!" and he pricked at Tony with the sword and laughed again as the man writhed. Then with a snarl he swung round upon Tabitha, who stood quivering in Dick's grasp. "And that vile wench of thine, she shall burn! Ay, it's the fire for——"

"*Pauca verba*, mine aged!" piped Captain Doricot's shrill voice. "To thy blankets, go! These rats be in my trap."

Hartop turned about with his bed-gown fluttering.

"And how came you here, sir?"

"Oh, an' it please you, we will be gone again, and leave the rats to eat you. What's your will, señor?"

"I meant no offence, sir," Hartop cried anxiously.

"Then give none. Which is, being interpreted, hold thy peace. Now will I tie up these true lovers."

He stooped to take Tony's sword-belt.

But Dick, trusting the woman to one hand for a moment, plucked out his roll of whipcord and tossed it down.

"*Trouvaille!* My rustic, thou art a pearl." In a moment Tony was tied tight at ankle and wrist. He made no effort to fight. He was cowed, dazed, and could not turn his eyes from Doricot. But Doricot was quick and cruel with the cord, and laughed to himself. "Good-bye to thee, my lad," he said, and strutted across to Tabitha.

At his touch she flamed out.

"Let me be, ye little vermin! Ah, how durst ye mishandle un so? You'm worse nor he, as you do know well. Oh, and you to tread on un!"

"Madame," said Doricot gravely, "good madame, was it I bade the fellow murder your uncle?" She quailed before his pale, flickering eyes, and he shook his head. "I do not like you, madame." She, too, was tied up ankle and wrist, but he allowed her a chair. Dick pressed her down into it and drew back to the door. He was enjoying life. Doricot turned to Mr. Hartop, who, pausing often to look and grumble and mutter threats, had begun to struggle into his clothes. "Now, mine aged, I am at leisure to expound."

"What's that, sir?" said Mr. Hartop. "If you would be so

kind as to get to Calne and tell the constable, Robin Higginbottom, which lives by the church, I would thank 'e for it."

"You are very generous, my friend. Without doubt, therefore, you yearn to reward me richly."

Mr. Hartop stared.

"How you come to be always about me that's more nor I know," said he. "But I be heartily glad you was here now, and if you would get to the constable, to Calne——"

"You are in a hurry to get rid of me, mine aged. Almost it might seem that you mistrusted my company. I confess I should resent that. Or you mean not to pay me due recompense for salving of you. That thought distresses me."

Mr. Hartop looked a sulky fear.

"I don't know how you come to be here," he muttered.

Then Tabitha spoke.

"Old fool thou be! 'Twas the little vermin as set us on to thee."

Mr. Hartop stared from one to the other. Doricot laughed.

"A venomous piece, that girl of thine, my friend. If she cannot stick thee, she would have thee quarrel with the man that saves thee."

"'Tis the little vermin hath the money that was stole from thee on the road," Tabitha cried. "Is't not, Tony? Tony, lad, speak—speak!"

"Tony?" quoth Doricot, as if he heard the name for the first time. He strutted across the room to the prostrate Tony and stirred him with his foot. "Now, Tony, my sweet lad, speak! Did I bid thee steal? Did I bid thee do murder on an old man?" His comical piping voice suddenly acquired ferocity. "Answer me, knave!"

But Tony answered nothing.

Hartop, who was by now half-dressed, made a dash for the door. He came upon the breadth of Dick's hard bosom. Doricot hauled him back by the slack of his shirt.

"Fie, fie!—you neglect the decencies, mine aged. Consider—but for me you would be now upon your face, a dagger between your shoulders, dead as bacon. Relish that. Saving my presence, you are now a corpse—a corpse with the fiend, as you may expect, feeling for you. How much would you pay me to bring you back to life? Reckon it generously, and I protest I'll ask no more." Mr. Hartop here spluttered something. "Hush, hush, you will always be talking! Now look you, the jest is that I ask you nothing."

"Then, what a plague be you saying?" cried Mr. Hartop.

"We come to the marrow of the matter. Gift me no gifts. Stake something on my fortunes. I, Captain Nicholas Doricot, with a certain small fame, look you, I am about to sail on a venture to Tripolis, Egyptus, and the Syrias. My ship is found and chartered. I need no more than a two hundred pound or three to equip me. For the which, as you have a mind to lend me, I accord you one twenty-fifth share in the venture, and promise a profit not less than fifty per centum. Honour of Nick Doricot!"

He tapped his breast.

"I—I—I—" Mr. Hartop stammered, "I lend thee a two hundred pound? I'll see the hanged first!"

"Nay, nay," Doricot said sweetly, "that is not the way of it. But 'tis very like I may see thee stabbed. For since thou hast no thanks for thy salvation, I must needs restore thee to perdition. Therefore, I'll e'en cut the cords of these sweet children and set them at thee again, entwine thee desperately with monsieur, hand the dagger to madame, and bid good-night to Master Hartop."

He was smiling sweetly, but his hands clutched at the man and his eyes were strange.

"Are you mad?" Hartop squealed, twisting in his grip. "Sir, sir, this is no jest neither, I say. Why, 'tis foul and cruel, so it is. Oh, you be a lunatic—you——"

"Bibble babble!" Doricot broke in. "What!—that way will not please you neither? You prefer me to meddle? You demand it? Nay, sir, but we must have justice. So here's for it!"

He hurled himself upon Mr. Hartop, and the two went down on the floor together. When Doricot rose again out of a storm of complaints and oaths, Mr. Hartop was bound as firmly as the others. Captain Doricot looked the helpless creatures over and shook his head.

"A sad scene!" he lamented. "Almost I despair of human dignity."

Mr. Hartop, who was purple and swollen, poured out a flood of threats and abuse.

"Now cometh justice," quoth Doricot, and enthroned himself on the end of the bed. "Master Hartop—you are proven mean in the heart. You must be taught to spend. Ho, rustic, feel in his pouch there!" Mr. Hartop vehemently protesting, Dick plucked out a bunch of keys. "Apply them to the strong

box there, good rustic." Mr. Hartop lamenting, the iron-bound box, his bank, was opened. Doricot leaned over and drew out two of the leather bags which it held, and solemnly counted himself two hundred pounds. "Two hundred, nor less nor more," said he. "I would have given thanks for it as a loan. It was denied, and justice commands that it be made a fine." Mr. Hartop lifted up his voice anew. "Two hundred to me." Doricot pouched the gold. "Five pounds to my minister, the good rustic." He slapped them into Dick's broad palm. "Justice is satisfied." Punctiliously he put the remainder back in the box. "Down with the lid, rustic. Lock and restore the keys to our ancient, that he may praise God he fell not among thieves. So thy work is done. *Via!* Away, I need thee no more!" Dick looked at him oddly, and grinned and shambled out. Doricot skipped down from the bed. "Oh, Hartop, let thy soul take heed to this lesson, or the deadly sin of avarice shall condemn thee to perdition." He turned from the answering objurgations to Tabitha, who wriggled on her chair and screamed at him. "Madame," he said gravely, "you are a woman who have forgot that you are a woman. You must be taught by suffering. Farewell! Tony Dassell—you are a man who would cheat his friend. Therefore, you are no use to any man. We abandon you."

He strutted out and laughed as he went.

So they three were left close bound to revile each other. But Tony Dassell lay silent and his face was wet with tears. . . . The candle spluttered and went out, and darkness fell upon their plight. . . . And none were like to find them till the shepherds came to the farm on Saturday.

If Tabitha and her uncle had not fallen to shrieking at each other they might have heard Captain Doricot swear and swear again. For when he came to the road he found in place of his horse the horse that had fallen with Tony. Dick had made the exchange, and Dick had vanished. To hunt him was plainly mad. Doricot's mirth was something chastened as he jogged back to Calne. But he laughed still. Besides the humours of the good folks in the farmhouse, he appreciated the humour of his own case. And he admired his rustic.

Prudence bade him get quickly away from the neighbourhood of Mr. Hartop, but he had no mind to go without his supper. He made for 'The Bull.' Though the rest of Calne town had been some while abed, the good hostess was waiting for him. He told her a fascinating fable of an accident to his friend at Avebury

which must make him ride away to Poole that very hour to warn the poor lad's wife he was a-dying. Having thus spread a neat fog over his intention to make for Bristol, he finished his supper and took a polite farewell with kisses.

And in the yard he found two horses and Dick. He laughed softly.

"Now, why, my lad—why, why, why?"

"I took the best horse for you to have the worse un. So as to make sure where you was a-going."

"And why?"

"For to go with you," quoth Dick with a grin.

"It is in my mind," said Doricot, "that if I do not kill you first, I may like you well."

Dick laughed.

"Dearie me, and me that's thinking the same of you!"

"So be it." Doricot mounted. "And now, my rustic, I'll thank ye for the money that Tony stole."

Dick laughed again.

"'Tis to go for my share in your ship."

"You believe that there is a ship?" Doricot grinned.

"Leastways, for my share in the captain," Dick drawled.

They jogged off very friendly into the night.

And that is the way whereby the money was found for the famous voyage of the ship *Toby* to the Levant seas and the parts of Syria, which is accounted one of the greater exploits of the great age of English seamen.

CHAPTER V

THE ALDERMAN'S DAUGHTER

"A NOBLE city," said Captain Doricot simply. "I was born here."

Dick Rymingtowne sniffed. He had a versatility in inarticulate sounds. They were standing at the door of the 'Blue Ball' tavern, a mean house all crazy and reeling, with its jutting upper stories as though they would throw themselves down, with its timbers eaten of worm and dry rot, and its plaster in ragged holes. Yet there was no other house so well preserved or promising better living in all the lane. From the end of the vista,

rosy sky pierced with masts, came a pungent quay pool smell. So for two reasons or more Dick Rymingtowne sniffed at the city of Bristol.

Captain Doricot turned and looked up at him, as you may see a terrier meditating mischief to a cow.

"My clown," quoth he, "my ditch-born, my thistle-eater, you made a noise, as I think."

"I've a nose, d'ye see."

"God help thee, I would be hard upon no man's infirmity. But go to, I am human. Such a nose it is that if thou dost force it on my thought, I must needs split it from the bowsprit to rudder-head. *Madre Dios*, for what other end was the thing made?"

"You'm so pleased with yourself 'tis pleasure to be with 'e," Dick Rymingtowne drawled through a sleepy grin.

It is beyond doubt that Doricot's repartee would have been masterly, but Providence was grudging. Two fellows, urged to the tavern door by an untimely thirst, jostled him as his mouth opened. So that what came forth were Italian oaths. Therewith he knocked their heads together and against the doorpost. Swearing less politely, they fell on him. Dick Rymingtowne bent over the tumultuous, vociferous heap with large hands ready for action. In bulk Doricot was not much more than half either of his two foes. The purple and gold that covered his lean little body appeared through the contortions only in glimpses, like scraps of decoration on the sombre frieze of the heavier men. But the yell that rose out of the swearing and writhing was from one of them. It was one of them who cast himself out of the fight and lay feeling tenderly at his right arm, and growling:

"No fair hold, I say—no fair hold."

Then Doricot was seen kneeling on the other man's chest, while his two claw hands possessed the throat and he spat abuse that smarted. The man's face darkened, his struggling limbs were blind. Doricot sprang to his feet and laughed like an old woman, and began to flick the dust from him with a lace handkerchief.

"Ye be fat knaves," he purred. "But for the tallow on you, you had made in some sort a fight. Nay, but I never knew a brace hold out longer against Nick Doricot. God's wounds, I have a mind to you! I'll burn a pottle for you. Go in!"

They had come to their feet; they were making sulky eyes at him. He thrust them before him and hustled them into the tavern.

Dick Rymingtowne was left scratching his heavy shoulder against the wall. He seemed to find life uninteresting. It is probable that he never had much taste for adventure. His ascetically practical mind from first to last, as I take it, judged Doricot *rococo* and wasteful.

In a little while the two fellows came out again and rolled off in spirits. Doricot followed, and cackled and tweaked Dick by the ear, and:

"Here's two more to our ship's company, my bully," quoth he. "And one a cooper, which I never thought to get for my twopence a day."

Dick shrugged.

"Cheap beasts is dear beasts. But you'm easy pleased seemly. Any man that you can master be man enough for you."

"And what other virtue hast thou, prithee?" Doricot purred.

Before further strife there puffed up a man all paunch, with face like a red full moon seen through a white mist of beard and whiskers.

"I ha' catched mun," he panted. "There's a gunner for 'e. The Genoans hath none such, no, not Johnny Dory. Now I'll be after Geordy Goswen to your carpenter. There's a shifty man!"

Away he puffed, while Doricot cheered him on.

"There's more of your dear bargains," Dick grumbled. "The gaffer was worn out while I was teething."

"Now rot thy marrow for a fool!" Doricot was honestly amazed. "It's the best mariner in England. He was boatswain to Sebastian Cabota."

"To be sure, I thought he was Noah's."

Doricot cursed him awhile in gentle elaboration, and then came back to affairs with a:

"Here's our crew coming with a fair wind. Now we must look for our ship."

Dick's jaw dropped.

"What's your will?"

"A ship, dolt. Didst think I had one in my holsters?"

Dick shuffled his feet.

"You told as you had a ship found and waiting," he said heavily. "Toby 'twas to name, and high charged. Else I had never give 'e my money for a share in the venture. You'm——"

"The which pittance," Doricot snapped his fingers at it, "I have spent in luckpennies for my crew. Well, sirrah?"

"You'm no honest man," said Dick stolidly.

"Oh sweet, oh rare!" Doricot struck at his ribs. "What's honesty to thee or me? What profit in an honest venture, sweet chuck? I begin as I would go on."

Dick would not be amused.

"You ha' no understanding o' me," he drawled. Then the heavy face twisted. "If 'e do think to pick a quarrel before I can pick a bit by it, you'm lost your way."

Doricot cackled and swore he was a jolly *camarado*, and went off to the quay to seek, as he said, his ship. Dick stayed scratching himself on the tavern door.

Down the lane came a gallant figure, a young man lilting with exuberant strength and the pride of life. Yet he was sedately clad in black, and an earnest gravity sat heavy on his comely face. He looked wise beyond his years and proud of it. Altogether, from his well-turned legs to his visibly respectable soul, Dick judged him an exemplar to ambitious youth. But he turned into the tavern. As he passed he gave Dick a glance which might have been no more than surprise that a fellow so plainly agricultural should lounge in the haunts of seamen, but which had at best no flattery in it. Dick may have been annoyed; or he may have thought that such a virtuous person would be useful leaven to Doricot's battered, bibulous crew, or in his drowsy fashion he may have imagined a joke. Whatever the cause, he shuffled into the tavern and saw the good young man sitting at a table apart from common drinkers, with the tapster obsequious. Dick tapped him on the shoulder, and as he turned to display genially contemptuous surprise, drawled out:

"You'm a mariner?"

All the tavern stared. The good young man gave a laugh of condescension, and:

"Yes, my lord."

The tavern laughed with him.

"Be you hired?" quoth Dick, in the manner of a farmer at a sheep fair. "I've a good luckpenny for a willing lad."

Some of the tavern company laughed louder. There was an acidity in the good young man's smile.

"Hie away back to thy pigs, good fellow," quoth he, and turned away.

Dick tapped him on the shoulder, and when he looked round drawled:

"Pigsty to you."

The good young man shrugged, and:

“Have the fellow out, tapster!” he said.

The tapster looked at Dick’s bulk, and shifted his feet and chose to hear the landlord calling.

Dick sat himself down at the table, and leaned over it till his breath was on the good young man’s cheek.

“Would ’e have me out yourself, now?” he invited.

The answer was a call for the landlord, and when he came leisurely from among the barrels behind the lead-covered counter:

“Look ye, my friend. You will have this fellow out or me, and you will have no more at the ‘Blue Ball.’”

“There now,” says the landlord, “crack a quart and drown it.”

“I have spoken,” quoth the good young man.

“Well, to be sure!” The landlord meditated. “Wilful will to worse. For his master and he they spend like gentry. And you spend naught save on victuals, which is no profit. So e’en good day to you, Master Brook.”

“Captain Brook!” quoth the good young man haughtily as he rose. With contempt he looked round the tavern, which, indeed, but that its clients were seamen one and all, had no kinship with his respectability. Smelling strong of stale liquor, with dirty puddles in the sand of the floor, the plaster fallen from between the rafters, the plaster of the walls scrawled with crude and worse than crude devices, the ‘Blue Ball’ made no pretence of decency. Its clients matched it well. Slovenly, ragged doublets, faces scarred and seamed and swollen, were the one fashion there. “Good day to you!” said Captain Brook, counted out money precisely, and stalked on in dignity. But from the door unfortunately he recoiled in disorder.

Through the door came a shrill Italian oath and a:

“Give way to thy betters, thou codshead!” and Doricot came with a swagger, the fist that had discomposed Captain Brook making patterns in the air. Doricot halted on tip-toe and sniffed at him. “A pretty fellow, God wot! I’ll take thee to my cook’s mate, dainty chops, and thou——”

Captain Brook muttered something, swept him aside, and strode out.

“Look ye,” quoth Doricot to the tavern, “there goes a quarrelsome fellow. A fellow that will never lie still till one slitteth his weasand for the sake of quiet.”

There was laughter, and the landlord chuckled:

"You ha' no luck with him, you nor your man."

"*Plait-il?*" Doricot blinked at Dick. "And what was your way of it, mynheer?"

"Nobbut asked un if a was a mariner," Dick drawled.

Again the tavern laughed. "And him the youngest captain out o' Bristol, and the proudest by all the length of his long shanks."

"Now there's a sin!" cried Doricot. "What hath yon side of beef to be proud upon?"

"Nay, now, nay," the landlord protested, "and him new made the master of Alderman Fry's great ship."

"*Hein?*" Doricot cocked a meditative eye. "God help us, God help us—a mad world! That mother's darling to be master in a great ship! Why, no wonder he is beside himself!"

And yet again there was laughter, but the landlord shrugged:

"Nay, fair's fair. Charley Brook be no use to me, nor any man that makes his living out o' liquor. But it's a good seaman, my lad, and never wronged man nor woman neither. I wish ye all as honest."

"Now, from all honest men and holy women, good Lord deliver us!" quoth Doricot.

A voice piped out above the alcoholic laughter:

"Charley's none so vartuous. He can play St. John's night with a girl, I warrant him!"

Doricot started round.

"What, d'ye tell me the fellow is a man? Who is the fool of a woman, then?"

Dick's sleepy eyes stared hard. He did not understand the pertinacious interest of Doricot in Captain Brook.

The owner of the piping voice, a lad with an old man's face, chuckled villianously.

"Why, 'tis Alderman Fry's red daughter Kate. A gloomy piece, to my thinking. But Charley hath been hand and glove with her this year ago. The old alderman had to hear naught of it, being so rich and proud and all. So they've a-kissed in the dark. But I've bore their tokens many a time."

"Women! Women!" Doricot rebuked the sex. "Ye were made to set fools o' horseback. So mistress Kate hath beguiled her father to give his argosy to this saintly lubber?"

The lad laughed, and the landlord:

"You dunno Alderman Fry. He'd give ne'er a groat to any

man, no not for his daughter, nor her mother neither, without he made sure to get two back. Nay, Charley Brook stands on his own legs. The alderman reckons him a safe man. And there's not so many, saving your presence."

Doricot spat.

"I detest the tribe!"

The lad took up the tale.

"Why, the old man dunno as they be courting. They was never to tell till Charley had a ship. The old un be that lofty. 'Tis why Charley paid me not to blab."

"Trusty fellow!" quoth Doricot. "But go to, I am weary of your Brook. 'Tis a vile liquor, water. Bring me a pint of sack."

Over it he relapsed into silence, a thing so rare in him that Dick stared the harder. When he rose and strutted out, Dick followed him.

Doricot heard behind him the shuffle over the kidney stones, and turned with a grin, and a:

"What's your will, my innocent?"

"To know yourn."

Doricot grinned more widely.

"Go before, sirrah. Find me the way to master alderman's."

"Why, you'd never part true lovers, surely?" Dick chuckled.

"Sirrah, I would part the devil from hell if I needed it."

Dick gaped.

"Aw, that's terrible fine; but it don't mean so much to my thinking. But that's like yourself to be sure."

The alderman lived in a street of magnificence. Each of the tall houses, glossy with white plaster and black oak, suggested permanent wealth and importance, but his was the largest, the most elaborately windowed, the most decorated with carving and paint. Doricot sucked in his lips.

"Here should be a turkey worth roasting," quoth he. "Go to, knock. Nay, not so meekly, lubber. With a fandango and a thunderbolt, thus."

The performance was hardly finished when the door flew open and Captain Brook rushed upon them. He thrust Doricot aside and stamped off. His respectable face was dark, and he breathed hard. Doricot cackled.

"Look you, what an ox is a man in love! The poor beast asks to be made steaks for his betters."

He repeated with his sword-hilt the fandango and the thunderbolt.

The answer came in the shape of a scurrying maid, who cried out:

"Give us grace, give us grace! What's the matter?"

"Captain Nicholas Doricot out of Tripolis, the ports of Ægyptus and Syria. Lead me to the alderman," said Doricot.

He moved his sword in the scabbard and thrust it home again, whirled the cloak of purple and gold, and struck an attitude.

The maid bobbed a frightened curtsy and fled. Doricot followed close on her heels, and Dick on his. So that when she tapped on a door from behind which came stormy voices and getting no answer, opened it, they saw the alderman starting from his chair to aim a blow at his daughter's ears. It went home, and she reeled, and then, staying herself by the arras, tense with passion, she gazed at her father, cheeks and eyes and bosom telling one tale of hate.

Doricot strutted in daintily and sat himself down.

"At your leisure, at your leisure." He waved his hand.

"*La parole est à mademoiselle, je crois.*"

The alderman, with the aid of the devil's name, asked who he was.

"Nay, let my affair wait," quoth Doricot handsomely; "mademoiselle is impatient."

The alderman rushed at his daughter and caught at her wrist and dragged her out. Dick stared heavily after them. The alderman was opulently built, with a wide and shiny face, bald at the brow, which glowed crimson. It was his mouth which distinguished him, a mouth of great extent, with straight lips opening square. The reddish beard and moustachios were too closely cut to hide it. His daughter, too, had some red in her hair, some hint, for all her youth, of his solidity, something of his development of jaw. But in her it was all softened and refined by more than sex or youth. Other blood than his had made her skin olive, her hair the darkest of russet and her eyes.

"There's a brave minx," Doricot piped. "Damme, it warms my heart to cross her."

Dick gaped at him and leaned a shoulder against the door, all heavy, indolent stupidity. But his ear was close to the crack of the door. Doricot began to patter round the room, peering with sudden short glimpses like a bird at papers and coffers and books and making birdish sounds as he peered. From the depths of the house door banging and the boom of the alderman's voice were heard. Doricot was down in his chair again,

cackling to himself and sniffing, before the alderman's emphatic feet came back. Other feet followed them and a rustle of skirts, and Dick's ear at the door heard a woman breathless:

"Mr. Fry, what have you done by her?"

"Set her where she may cool her wanton blood, mistress. Go to, you shall not come to her neither. And if she be not wiser by the morning my Indian cane shall school her sides."

"Ha!" Doricot heard the alderman's roar, though he had missed the question. "To whom doth he prophesy?"

Dick shook a listless head, which had divined for itself that the woman was the mother. He heard her again.

"Nay, prithee, let me speak with her. She——"

"She speaks with none but me, mistress. What! Have I forgot? You were malapert as she till I schooled you. Get you gone. Go in, I say, go in!"

There was some sound of movement, and then a stifled cry, and a laugh from the alderman. In a moment he entered, his large crimson face horribly discordant with its red beard. Doricot laughed his old woman's laugh:

"Take breath, take breath."

"Who sent thee here?"

"My good will to thee." Doricot stood up. "You meet Captain Nicholas Doricot from Tripolis, Ægyptus, and the ports of Syria."

"I can find me a score such on the quay. Away with thee! I've naught for broken men."

Doricot began to laugh.

"There spoke a fool. Look thee, sirrah fool, if we join hands for my venture, I can put five hundred pounds to it."

The alderman was plainly startled. But he laughed contempt.

"Five hundred pounds of wind."

Doricot flourished out a leather bag.

"You can count if we close."

"Be sure I shall," the alderman snapped, and then hesitated.

"*Plait-il?*"

"Speak out. What is the venture?"

Doricot laughed.

"Hark 'e, my ruddy friend, I trust thee no more than I trust a horsefly. If I speak thee frankly, 'tis because I am well assured that none but Nick Doricot can venture my venture."

"I look for naught of thy speech or thy venture," the alderman sneered. "Speak or begone, all's one."

After which compliments they stared at each other and seemed far better friends.

"Now, master alderman. I take thee wise enough to know that for all the Portugals have found their way at sea by Bona Speranza, the most and the best of the spices of the Indies do come to us still overland to Ægyptus and the Syrias."

"My prentice lads know so much."

"*Bien!* On my last voyage, putting into Malta after lemons for the scurvy, there lay a galley out of Alexandria changing prisoners from the Knights of St. John. We did some traffic of soap and nails with the infidels, and their captain coming aboard us, I found him a renegade, an Englishman out of Watchet, that was carpenter aboard my first ship. Peter Drew is his name, who hath called himself Achmet Bey in their jargon. He was took with the *Jenny* out of Barnstaple, off the Morea. A jolly fellow, but it was a skill in corncutting (natural to his trade) that saved his throat and after delivered him from the prisons. Now he is high among their captains. We two, then, compounded together that I should voyage this summer to Alexandria for a cargo of spices. For I may pay him a better price than they get from the Genoans or the Venetians (which be no better than leeches), and yet make a great profit. I appointed him time and place for his galley in a desolate haven of Ægyptus. I have a five hundred pound for the voyage, and there lacks me only a ship. How say you?"

The alderman sneered.

"A ship to sail after a fairy tale!"

Doricot sprang up.

"*En avant, Diccon.* We have mistook. 'Tis no merchant, but a pedlar."

The alderman bade him wait, but Doricot swept on and out. When they were well away he began to cackle gently to himself. Dick plodded on heavily. Doricot slapped him on the shoulder.

"The gudgeon nibbles, lad."

"I've no liking for he," quoth Dick. "I've a mind to go tell Master Brook his maid's locked in the cellar."

Doricot checked, his claw hand on Dick's arm; but then he began to cackle again, and:

"Good child," quoth he, "go and play."

With long silent strides the hulking form went away from him through the twilight. And Captain Doricot, it may sur-

prise you to hear, then set himself to make up his crew with a fiery zeal that demanded he should lack no man by dawn.

Dick's work was more romantic. A question or so at the "Blue Ball" and on the quay discovered for him Brook's new lodging. There he found the good young man in darkness material and ideal. Dick asked for a candle, and when it came grinned broadly at his melancholy.

"You!" Brook's surprise was dreary. "What do you want of me?"

"I ha' seen your maid. She'm a lusty piece. Give 'e good will. But you did ought to know as her old father hath beat her and locked her in the cellar, and means to go beat her again o' morning unless she'll swear to have no more of 'e. I heard un threatening when we was three about our matters. 'Twas your right for to know, being an unclean business to a loving man."

Brook stared, stumbled to his feet, and rushed out. Dick shrugged. He conceived the situation beyond Brook's grasp. Brook should have asked for help. Nevertheless, a curiosity as to the ways of other men with maids, which seems to have left him never, took him to see how Brook would fare. There was not much to see. Brook came to the stately house and knocked, and thrust himself past the answering servant before she could say him nay. In a little while the calm of the night was disturbed by angry voices—Captain Brook passionate, the alderman menacing and brutal. A little longer and the voices were shouting, the door opened again to show a struggle, and Captain Brook, propelled by the alderman's prentices and serving-men, was hurled out. Before he had picked himself up the door was banged and barred. He could think of nothing better to do than pick his hat out of the kennel and slink away.

At this moment, as I take it, Dick's contempt for him was overwhelming, but it begat no favour for the alderman. On the contrary, chastisement for the alderman appeared a duty demanded by the righteous scheme of things. Dick lounged along Maryport Street, and where he found the kidney stones loose he pouched them. Coming again to the corner by the alderman's house, he tried the big stones set to keep cart-wheels from the wall, found one give, and marched off with it and set it down by the alderman's back door. Then he slouched round the corner again, and with speed the kidney stones found each a billet in a different window. There was a very volley of shattering glass.

Before the assaulted household rushed out he had retired easily from his strategic position at the corner to another street. While prentices and serving-men ranged this way and that, he picked up his big stone and hurled it at the back door. A panel gave before it, and a hinge with a hoarse shriek of rent timber, which brought answering shouts. Then at last Dick ran.

CHAPTER VI

THE ALDERMAN'S VOYAGE

IN the "Blue Ball" Dick found his little captain talking to half a dozen tarry men while he supped off herrings and mulled ale. The half-dozen were enlisted in as many minutes and bidden be ready to sail at dawn. Then Doricot turned to Dick and heard his tale of Brook's disaster and the bombardment, and cackled continuously.

"I thought it would keep un good and wakeful," Dick explained.

"You think more than you look, my lad," quoth Doricot, looking at him keenly. "It might make the señor believe that our Brook had a party to help him."

"Aw now," Dick gaped. "You'm so sharp in your wits."

Doricot pinched his ear and cackled, and ordered ale for him, and a rasher.

In the morning early a letter came for Doricot that bade him go hastily to the alderman, who had thought of his venture, and would speak of it again. Doricot slapped the paper.

"Our gudgeon hath bitten," quoth he. "Come, my bully!" and off they went.

The wealthy house had an air of dissipation. In daylight the broken windows became exaggerated. Folks loitered and gazed and gaped. A sturdy porter opened in the maid-servant's stead, and shut it again sharply. The alderman was waiting for Captain Doricot.

"I commend him," quoth Doricot.

The alderman awaited them in a severe little room amid papers, and was very much the merchant.

"A good morning, Captain! I thank you for your speedy

coming." The alderman coughed and looked at Dick. "Do we need the lad, Captain Doricot?"

"*Quoi?*" Doricot stared. "I have no secrets, alderman."

"Why, I mean what is he?"

"If I knew that, I might cut his throat. It's either more a fool than I want or more a knave than I can use."

The alderman showed no satisfaction.

"Is he your friend or your servant, sir?"

"Neither, I thank God."

"We might be better without him," the alderman suggested through amazement.

"At your pleasure," Doricot shrugged. "He will hear as much one side the door as the other."

The alderman made signs of despair.

"Then you two are one?"

"As much as St. George and the dragon. But I take it that you have some desperate iniquity in hand?"

"Fie, sir!" the alderman laughed. "You mock me. It's no more than your own venture." He paused. "Which I'll not hide from you hath, after thought, liked me better than I would hastily allow. You know the Levant, Captain Doricot?"

Doricot snapped his fingers.

"From Jaffa to Cavo Mattapan, from Constantinople to Alexandria of Ægyptus, as I know Avon mud, or Barnstaple bar, or Sutton pool."

The alderman coughed and became more geographical, but Doricot overwhelmed him with geography. He tried to assert himself.

"Now, as touching seamanship——"

In the sputter of an Italian oath Doricot turned upon Dick:

"My Achates, I have lived to hear a fat pedlar call me lubber. I have lived too long, or he hath." He approached the alderman menacing. "My pennywise, have your long ears heard tell of old Will Gunson?"

The alderman bowed before the name, the name of one who had been paymaster of the King's navy, and sent a famous voyage to Crete. Doricot flourished out a parchment with Gunson's superscription.

"This is very good." The alderman hardly restrained himself from geniality. "Now, sir, of this venture of yours, what do you hope?"

"*Pardieu*, sweet oils and cotton wools, pepper and cinnamon

Ace No 2 1587

and galls and other spices, enough to freight a ship of three hundred tons burden."

"Say you so? And you will adventure a five hundred pounds upon the voyage?"

"Give me a great ship well found and freighted, and I will pay you five hundred pound, and of all the profits of the venture one-fourth shall be yours and three-fourths mine."

"It is a poor pittance," said the alderman pensively. "What commodities do you seek for your freight?"

"As I told you, soap and nails; which are naught to us here, but most precious to the infidels. So that we get, like Diomedes, armour of gold for armour of bronze. You may also provide me a parcel of calf skins."

"It is a poor pittance," the alderman repeated. "But there's good service you could do me."

"Shall I marry your daughter, señor?"

The alderman flushed.

"Prithee, let my daughter's name be. If I give you ship of mine, sir, there's a fellow I would have you take with you."

Doricot looked at him with narrowing eyes.

"Ay, Bristol folk have been blithe kidnappers this thousand year. Well, what's this piece of man's flesh?"

"Sir, it's an insolent, masterless man; one Brook, a fellow I have made out of nothing, which besets me, ay, sir, with wanton violence. I would have you get him aboard with you."

"And?" Doricot sneered. "And?"

"And leave him far enough from me and mine."

"With the Turks or the sharks? What matter to a godly alderman! So be it. Write off Master Brook. Where's the ship?"

The alderman laughed.

"You are a quick man, Captain Doricot. Understand me, I want no noise of this about the town."

"Now that's godly," quoth Doricot.

So it was settled. The alderman became almost jovial about the details. He had perhaps not hoped that the venture would discover such sober plans behind its queer scheme when he determined that Doricot would serve to rid him of Captain Brook. A piratical fellow who could be reasonably commercial was a discovery that exalted his spirits. He grew as eager to plan the voyage and the trading as to get Brook under hatches.

There was a ship provisioned and watered and ready to sail,

the ship of which Brook himself should have been master. She had no cargo aboard, for she was meant to go round to Plymouth in ballast and fill her hold with Tavistock kersies. So it would be easy to furnish her swiftly with the soap and nails for Doricot's venture. The alderman boasted that he would have all ready in three days. But he was anxious to get Brook out of his way still sooner. Could Doricot find his own crew? Doricot swore to find crew enough for Master Brook in an hour. He would see the ship, and if she liked him would engage to have Master Brook aboard her in the bilboes that night. The alderman chuckled and then thought of caution.

"You must needs take him warily. I doubt he hath some sturdy friends."

"I also, monsieur," quoth Doricot, and looked at the alderman queerly. "Fear not. He shall go aboard as quietly as the sun sets. Much about the same time."

"After all," said the alderman, "he hath none of note to stand by him in Bristol, being a Bridgewater man. So there will be none to seek him."

"God help whosoever comes a-seeking aboard my ship," quoth Doricot.

"I will come aboard after nightfall," said the alderman, "and see that you have him safe. Then we can draw out the order for your freight and the voyage."

"We will take right good order, mynheer," quoth Doricot.

"Now I will give you warrant for the ship-keepers, and one of my lads shall go with you."

"*S'il vous plaît*," quoth Doricot.

So Dick and he went aboard the *Toby*. You must not imagine her beautiful. She was short and she was wide. If you can conceive a barge with wooden castles at bow and stern you will have some notion of her lines. But Doricot smacked his lips over her and bade Dick away to the "Blue Ball" to bring boatswain and crew. You see them coming over the side, a tattered, hard-worn company. As he lounged on the poop by Doricot, Dick sniffed at them loudly, and:

"Here be scarecrows enough for a county," quoth he, and waited an answer.

But Doricot's eyes were gazing away and ahead. It is possible that Dick was not ill-satisfied. The line of Doricot's vision led straight to a brace of long guns in the waist of the ship. She was, for her kind, well armed.

Now, the alderman was impatient. The alderman had a wife and his daughter a mother. Whereby the affair was complicated. Impatient to see the detested Brook in irons, he could not wait for dark. As soon as the sun was down he went hurrying to the quay. For a night and a day his daughter, locked contumacious in the dark, had been given nothing better than bread and water. He was hardly out of the house before her mother grasped at the chance to spread her a richer meal. Laden with tearful sentiment and baked meats, the mother opened the cellar door. She had but just set down her tray, she had only begun to pour forth her sympathy, when the passionate daughter, without one filial word, thrust her affections aside and flung open the door and darted out. Before the mother had become able to understand that anything had happened, the daughter was in the street and a hundred yards away.

Of course, she sought her lover. In a tumult of exultation and half-gratified anger and eager passion she made for the "Blue Ball." You know why Brook was not there. Its landlord grinned interest from ear to ear as he told her where to find him. And so, in the darkest twilight, at the hour when all honest folks were at supper, she came to Brook's lodging and his arms.

Some time before, the alderman had gone aboard his ship and found Doricot dreaming over the flood tide.

"Well, sir—well, what's done?" he cried.

Doricot woke with a start, and stared at him as if he were a miracle, and at last began to grin.

"You are a cock that crows at midnight," quoth he, and strutted away. He spoke briefly with his fat red boatswain, who went forward for a half-dozen men, and he turned to Dick. "Here's for you, my lad. See they get mynheer out of the house daintily, and Antony will answer for the rest. But he'll take orders from you. No noise about it, or we are fast aground. But it's business you were made for."

"Thank 'e for naught," said Dick, but he dropped into the boat, where they had a parcel of small cords and a sail and a wad of oakum.

So he came with his company to Brook's lodging. He chuckled to see light in it, and:

"Bide you here," quoth he to the boatswain, "and if a will come out quietly, do 'e take un as a comes. And if a will not be a good fellow, I'll whistle to 'e for to come up."

The boatswain drew his men on either side the door.

Dick went in as quiet as a cat and asked no one's leave to open the door on Captain Brook, who was thereby discovered with Kate Fry on his knee. Which of the three was most amazed you may hardly guess. Which was most amused there is no doubt, for when Dick, with a great chuckle, said: "Give 'e joy and give me leave. There's a good fellow below stairs, a merchant out o' Plymouth, wants speech of 'e, and I would not bring him up with mistress here," Brook scowled at him, and Kate with her face all crimson stared wonder and fear, and clutched at her man. "Will 'e come down now?" Dick entreated. "I think a hath some business for 'e, having come by Bridgewater."

Captain Brook was visibly torn between disgust and distrust and surprise.

"I know no man to Plymouth," he muttered.

"Nor do I, to be sure," said Dick cheerily.

Brook frowned amazement and hesitated, and made a step forward. The woman clung more closely. "I'll not go down," he cried. "Who is he?"

Dick shrugged his shoulders and whistled. Then he laughed. "Why, look 'e, he do know that, not I."

Feet came up the stair.

Brook started forward and came upon the bulk of Antony, the boatswain.

"What's your errand?" he cried, recoiling.

A great arm wrapped him round tenderly. A mouthful of oakum was thrust upon him. He was swept off his feet. He had hardly begun to plunge and writhe before alert hands had cords all about him. Like a plank, and as impotent, he was passed from hand to hand down the stair.

As the woman saw, Dick clapped his hat over her mouth and held her. She thrust at him and struggled fiercely, and struck and writhed to win her head free and scream. "Oh, be easy," said Dick. "Never beat a willing horse, my dear."

The boatswain caught her wrists. "Nay, you'm naughty," said he. "What's to do, my son?"

"Why, would 'e part a lass from her man?" Dick chuckled.

"I do allow she'm asking to be took." The boatswain scratched his bald head; then he, too, chuckled. "'Twill be pretty to hear the captain swear." So they tied her up in the sail and carried her out.

Dick lingered to look round the room for anything worth taking. Whereby he was some little after the others, and though they had been most seaman-like quiet about their business, were nearly in trouble. For as he went down the stairs he met the mistress of the house, who having eaten her own supper was coming to clear away Brook's. "Servant, sir," says she, and plainly wanted to know what he was doing.

Dick nodded.

"Captain Brook hath just took his lass to see some friends out of Bridgewater, aboard the *Mary Ann*." And with a quiet conscience he went his way.

To a friend who, most unfriendly, recognized him in spite of the dark, the boatswain grumbled against lubbers who drank themselves silly and had to be carried aboard. So easily they came to their boat.

If they had been longer about it, Doricot complained afterwards, the alderman would have done with the world that night. For the latter made himself abominable with nervous iteration of fear that everything had gone wrong. When oars were heard through the dark, when the boat came alongside, he was all but into the river with peering at her. He was thrust aside without mercy, and by dim lantern light they made fast and the boatswain heaved himself aboard.

"Have you done your business?" quoth Doricot.

"Ye will say so," the boatswain chuckled, and Dick came aboard.

Doricot clapped him on the shoulder with a "Good boy!" and he grinned, and the two dumb bodies were hauled on deck.

"*Gottes teufels hölle!*" Doricot cried. "Two! Two! *Viejo diablo da*— Give me light, I say!" He tore the sail from the woman, he snatched at a lantern and thrust it at her face. Then with a cackling laugh he stood up straight and clutched at Dick. "My sweet babe!" he said.

The alderman thrust through the crew and all but fell as he peered down, and then screamed out, half-articulate:

"Shameless baggage! Ah, you blundering fools, that you are! And you——"

"*Doucement! Doucement!*" Doricot slapped at his mouth, and he spluttered and struck the hand away, swearing. It closed on his shoulder.

He bent over the two who lay there helpless, bewildered, yet fierce-eyed.

"Ah, you baggage, your sides shall be sore for this! You——"

"*Madre Dios!*" Doricot cried. "You have no variety!" He jerked the alderman back as he kicked the legs from under him. "Have him and the other man in the bilboes. The woman to the spare cabin. What, lively, I say!"

So the alderman found himself chained up in the dark with the man he had plotted to chain. What they said to each other is no matter for this decent tale. And to them and the dazed woman alone in the cabin came the call of the boatswain's pipe and the groaning of capstan and cable. Out with the ebb the *Toby* sailed away from Bristol town.

Twenty-four hours the prisoners lay in their quarters, punctiliously provided with prisoners' fare, for each two-thirds a seaman's ration of beer and bread and salt horse. It appears that they ate little. The ship was running into a golden sunset with the swell of the cliffs to port all a red glow, when Doricot, who had conned all day like a man in a trance, condescended to wake and speak.

"Have all the pretty birds to my cabin, my lad," said he to Dick at his elbow.

"What's to do?" Dick drawled, who was something dispirited by the ship's pitching.

"*Quien sabe?* Who knows, my innocent?" Doricot cackled.

In the great cabin Doricot lounged at his ease, his small legs spread over a bench of cushions. There two seamen brought him Kate Fry, and he rose and waved them away and bowed to her.

"What do you want of me?" she cried.

"You allow me to be frank? Then I profess I never saw a woman of your years whom I wanted so little." He sat down again and reflected that the cabin's green paint was hard upon her. For she was very pale.

"What do you mean to do with us?"

"That, madonna, is what I am trying to find out."

Before she could make anything of that Dick led in the alderman and Captain Brook, dirty, dishevelled, and weary both. The alderman barked out:

"You lying scoundrel!" and seemed to expect Doricot to fall down before him.

Doricot waved a hand.

"Come, my friends, let us understand ourselves. It was

convenient to me to take you. But you are now no more use. If I let you go, what will you do for me?"

On this and all they appeared to think him impudent. The alderman broke out:

"I'll have thee hanged for a pirate if there's a law in England." Doricot cackled a little.

"Monsignor, if that's your mind, go on deck and take a look at English land. For thou 'lt never see it again."

"What, sirrah?" the alderman started up. "Would you murder me?"

"Nay, that were waste. There's many a port in Barbary where a good fat fellow like thee will fetch a price. Nay, you shall fare no worse than you designed for Master Brook. It's a manly life, as they say, in the Moorish galleys."

The alderman collapsed, while his daughter and Brook glared at him.

"Fine fortune you ha' made for us all by your plots with this knave," quoth Brook.

"Fie, fie!" Doricot protested. "The godly fellow hath made himself a sweetly just end."

"This is mad," the alderman panted feebly. "You could not play such a trick, sir. There be too many to miss me."

"They could seek thee in the galleys."

"Sail back to Bristol and I'll hold thee scathless. I'll call it a jest."

Doricot laughed aloud.

"That were a jest indeed. The ship is mine now, señor, and I would ha' gone through hell to get her."

The alderman seemed to shrink.

"Put me ashore, at least," he wailed. "What ill have I done you? My God, is it not enough that you rob me of my best ship? Put me ashore!"

"Will you buy yourself? The Moors would buy you. Are you worth a bill for five hundred pound?"

The alderman seemed to diminish again.

"You shall have it," he gasped.

"And as much more for your daughter," said Doricot carelessly.

But the alderman flushed again, and started forward and snarled:

"Not a penny. She hath made her bed. Let her lie on it." Doricot shrugged his shoulders.

"*Dixit*," quoth he. "She may go to Algiers for hire." And he turned to Brook. "Well, my lord, and what will you bid for yourself?"

"You are a vile, treacherous knave," said Brook stubbornly. "I'll make no bargain with you. You can do your worst upon me, and I trust in God to see you punished."

"Fie, fie, you are not kind!" Doricot complained. "Come, I'll not deal hard with you. What will you give to be free with her?"

"I'll make no bargain with you," Brook cried. "I pray God to call you to account."

"These saints!" Doricot shrugged and turned to the woman. "Prithee bring him to his senses, mistress."

"I would hate him if he yielded to you!" she cried fiercely.

Then Doricot gave a great laugh and sprang out of the cabin, crying as he went:

"Back the foresail! Lower the cockboat!" And from the deck he shouted to his prisoners: "Come up and I will show you a thing."

When they came, something dazed, the ship lay hove to and a boat was under her port quarter. To Brook and the woman Doricot made a magnificent bow.

"Monsieur et madame, you have spirit and (who knows?) perhaps your children may have brains. There is your boat, and there is Lynmouth beach. Give you good night." Half by force, for they were halting and dumb with amazement, he had them overside. The alderman made to follow them. "Cast off!" Doricot cried. "Foresail halyards!" The ship began to slip through the water again. He embraced the alderman. "Mynheer, you go a voyage with me."

The alderman gave a wild cry, and rushed to the bulwarks and gazed desperately at the boat, at the red cliffs beyond. But already the boat was far away. He turned trembling.

"What is it? What do you mean?"

"To teach you," quoth Doricot, "to traffic in man's flesh."

"Do you mean to make a slave of me?"

"No, señor, to make you a free man; to deliver you from the bondage of filthy lucre and cold honesty. Get forward. Give him a swab."

Into the forecastle the alderman, urgently protestant, was hustled and set to swab it out. He jibbed and the boatswain

corrected him with a cane. He showed fight and spent the next watch tied to the foremast with his swab and his full bucket about his neck. So he began his voyage. So began the famous voyage of the *Toby*.

But in the sternwalk Dick's practical mind was complaining.

"'Tis all mighty pretty, to be sure. But you ha' got no cargo after all."

"I never wanted any," Doricot cackled.

CHAPTER VII

DORICOT'S QUEST

It is to be regretted that among the many matters which Richard Rymingtonne left on record in his papers at Assynton—he was a neat and methodical man—there is not to be found his opinion of Captain Doricot. That he knew himself much better adapted for success in this world than Doricot is obvious. I make no doubt that he thought Doricot foolishly fantastic, dangerously weak. Which is natural, for more than once Doricot was nearly the end of him. Yet there are some signs that his passionately practical mind admired Doricot more than any other man. I cannot wholly account for this by recalling that it was Doricot who taught him seamanship.

In that matter, at least, Doricot was thorough. Probably he found some amusement in making a fellow so pleased with himself as Dick Rymingtonne understand how little he knew. Not only Doricot and the boatswain and the gunner wrought with him, but he was given to the youngers to take aloft—he was sick for the first time in his life in the maintop; and to the swabbers to take below—in the stench of the orlop he was sick for the last time in his life.

They made a good run from Bristol to Cadiz, for it took them less than three weeks. At the end of that time Dick was confident that he had no more to learn about ships or the sea. Thence they spent ten days in coming to Majorca. Doricot had no intention of going there, but the winds were contrary, and the *Toby*, like other ships of her day, would not work to windward handily. At the end of those ten days Dick was in a state of grace, convinced that of sea and ship he knew nothing. After a week waiting for a fair wind at Majorca, where they were all

very ill of drinking the wine of the country, the *Toby* sailed on the African coast and her proper business.

They were off Tripoli when the wind went round to the east again. While they beat to and fro, out of the east came another ship. She was a big thing. The castles at her bow and stern towered vastly higher than the *Toby's*. As she ran before the wind she was pitching wildly. At first Doricot turned up his nose at her.

"Spaniard," quoth he. "Look you, Diccon, the tub's a floating sermon against pride. She's as top-heavy as the stiff Don Dismallos themselves."

Then he whistled between his teeth and took a step forward. Staring with puckered eyes through the glittering air he saw a flutter of green and silver at the mastheads, and then blazoned all across the square sails the crescent of Mahomet and Turk and Moor. He said nothing for a while, but stared still at the towering, labouring ship, and licked his lips.

Till the end, I suppose, that first sea-fight was vivid in Dick's mind. It was the exemplar of many another. It was as brilliant as the scene—the clear, swift air that glittered as though it were all light; the sapphire foam-flecked sea, with a myriad rainbows dancing in the spray; the towering, labouring ship to shoreward, and the flaming colour of the land beyond, gold sand and white and red rock, and a bright mosaic of green, and mountains crimson and grey bold against the blue distance. Everything near or far, ship and tufted palm and mountain, stood out as sharply as the bulwarks under his hand.

The boatswain had piped to quarters. By the long guns in the waist stood canvas tubs of powder and buckets of water, and over the water ropes of match smouldered and hissed. The gun's crews were stripped to the waist and ready. But Doricot, standing by the wheel, gave no orders. The Turkish ship plunged on her way, and not till she had gone to leeward was the fight begun. Doubtless she expected no ill from a craft that was plainly no warship. She was first aware of danger when a gun roared and her mizzen swayed and crashed down. Another shot rent her poop. She answered gallantly enough. Before the long guns of the *Toby* could fire again—it was some ten minutes—she let off a whole battery. But Doricot had made no mistake. Like all the ships of her Spanish build, she carried no guns in all her armament with the range of the English ordnance. She was meant to fight at close quarters, and Doricot would not

let her close. He had her to leeward, and he kept away out of reach of her shot, and pounded her at leisure till she was a shapeless mass of wreckage.

After her guns had fallen silent, after all her masts had gone by the board, his guns rent her till at last a white flag fluttered wildly from the poop. Then he put his helm over, and the *Toby*, without a splinter torn from her, came down on her helpless prey. On poop and forecastle he had his crew ready with pikes, save a few marksmen who took muskets into the tops. But there was little need.

The hull of the Turk was gaping with a score of wounds from waterline to bulwark. She was down by the stern, and when she pitched in the swell her bows rose high out of the water as though she would sink stern foremost. The *Toby* ran alongside and grappled her. The timbers chafed and ground, and the boarders climbed her shattered, towering bows. They found none to fight. The ship from stem to stern lay a welter of wreck and slaughter. Guns and guns' crews were beaten down beneath masses of shattered timber. What few of the Turk were left with blood enough yet in them to stand lurked here and there, aloof from each other, motionless, dazed, as though purpose and power to act were frightened out of them. They were driven together easily as sheep, and their arms were taken from them, and they made no sign. Doricot tried them with questions of whence they came, whither they were bound, what was their freight; but all his languages—and he used four—found them deaf and dumb.

"If I were of your black blood I should see if fire and hook would make you speak!" he cried, and struck at the set, dull, swarthy faces with the flat of his sword.

They neither winced nor moved, and he stamped his foot and hissed abuse at them.

Dick stared. It was not like Doricot to break out so, and the cause seemed wholly inadequate.

Doricot turned away and bade drive the fellows aboard the *Toby* and lash them upon the orlop. Then he sent a party to cut through the wreckage and find what the Turks had in their hold, and he left the boatswain in command and went back to the *Toby* and his cabin, and there sat biting his nails. In a little while Dick came to tell him that there was in the cargo silk of all sorts, both raw and wrought, and carpets the like of which never were seen in England, and spices and perfumes.

"Get the trash aboard," said Doricot carelessly.

Dick gaped.

"You'm high and mighty. Boatswain saith as no ship out of England had ever such a prize. Be you well in your stomach?"

Doricot briefly cursed him and the prize and the boatswain.

"Master alderman, he will have it as they silks be worth their own weight in gold. He's so happy as a wasp in a plum."

Doricot bade him to the devil, and started up and thrust him out, and followed on his heels.

The crew were bustling zealously about the bales and rolls of merchandise, and all the waist of the ship was cumbered with them and their work. The air was full of noise. Down the shattered side of the Turkish ship tackle groaned and shrieked, and from high above came the rollicking shouts and songs of the boarders despoiling her. From the depths of the *Toby's* hold song and shout answered.

Alderman Fry, happy for the first time since he lost sight of Bristol, was feverish with knife and marlinspike, bursting open timber and canvas to pass judgment on the goods within, and he cried out:

"Stand to it, boys! Stand to it! Here's good measure for a twenty thousand pound or more."

"There's the soul of a hog!" quoth Doricot, and as he passed kicked him over.

The alderman sat up and stared after him, dumb in amazed indignation. Doricot strutted on to the poop, and thence barked at his crew angry abuse for sloth.

"I didn't know as you had such a mountain of soul," Dick drawled by his elbow. Doricot turned on him with an oath. "What's your will?" said Dick placidly. "You'm that sore in your tempers. To be sure, I'd ha' thought 'e might be a good fellow to-night, having come by what 'e came for."

Doricot condemned him for a fool.

"D'ye think I came to sea to fill your vile bellies?"

Dick chuckled.

"Nay, not till you had yourn running over. But here be enough to fill you, surely?"

"Mine innocent"—Doricot took hold of him—"belike I will give up all this and more and nor you nor I a penny the richer."

"Belike you'll grow wings," Dick chuckled.

"*Himmeldonner!*" Doricot cried. "Did ye take me for a huckstering hog like him yonder?"

"Nay, a naughtier beast nor him. Else 'e might ha' whistled for me."

"Bah, there's no spice of spirit in you!" quoth Doricot.

Dick scratched his head and grinned.

"And how long ha' you been a saint, if you please? And if you be, what be you doing at sea?"

Doricot did not answer. He stared away over the darkening sea to the violet void of the horizon. The wind was falling as night came and the sea grew quiet. The ships still gave to the swell, but lightly, and there was no foam nor spray nor any sound of breakers from the fading land. The noise of the cargo and the shouting seaman about them came like a puny insult to the gathering calm. Doricot turned.

"You are a clever lad, God help you!" said he. "*Mon ami*, I could wish you no worse than to get all you want." Dick gaped at him. "Hark ye now. In the *bagnios* at Alexandria there's a man that's more than brother to me. And more than all the world holds, my child. We were boys with Cabota and gunners in the *Holy Cross* when she went to Candia and Chio. Madonna, we knew how to be young!" He looked up at Dick with a queer smile. "You should learn that, child. We lived, those nights, among the vines in Zante. . . . Then one had to grow clever like you. Old Martin, of the Leadenhall in London, picked him out for a ship, and I would not serve under him for a covetous envy of his place, and so we parted ten year since."

"Ay, you'm a great age to be sure," Dick sniggered.

Doricot was deaf:

"Since ten years I have not seen him. And last year he was taken, he and his ship, by the filthy renegado Kheyr-ed-Din, whom they call Redbeard. The galleys took him into Alexandria, and there he lies in the *bagnio*. It cost me what I had to buy that news of a Venetian. Now, with all I can win, we go to Alexandria to buy Matt Winkfield."

Dick gaped.

"'Tis like as if you would go with a beefsteak into a lion's mouth to look for your brother that's eaten."

"Ay, you're a clever lad!" Doricot laughed sharply. "The right stuff not to make a captain."

He turned and shouted angrily to the boatswain to be short and have done.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WOMAN IN THE VEIL

THE sun lay on the water's edge and all the west was gleaming gold. Doricot stood and looked into the light awhile, then turned, and strutting to the stern gazed out at the darkening east. From the captured ship came a roar of laughter and shouts, and then a great cheer, and men ran to her shattered bulwarks yelling ribaldry as a bundle swung outboard.

Doricot hissed a little Spanish and looked over his shoulder. The bundle betrayed itself a woman. She was—or she had been—mysteriously swathed in saffron, but as she swayed and twisted and struggled at the end of the tackle there was no mystery left to hide the floating trousers and close bodice of Turkish seraglios. The dark veil that shrouded her face remained faithful. She arrived with a thud, grovelling on the *Toby's* deck, and the seamen swarming about her gave a cheer for “Molly Breeches!”

Then Doricot came with vehement oaths and hands and they fled in disorder, leaving him in the midst over the prostrate veiled woman. She was in no hurry to rise. She drew the saffron cloak about her as she lay till it hid her again and yet revealed more than it hid—a rich, stately form. Then she raised herself on her arm and looked up at Doricot, her eyes flashing from the depths of her veil. Doricot made her a sweeping bow, and spoke in a *patois* of Italian and Greek.

“The sultana is fortunate to come aboard my ship.”

She laughed.

“I—I am always fortunate. But you will suffer gloriously.” And again she laughed.

“I thank you,” Doricot bowed again. “To suffer gloriously—what else is life, sultana?”

“Christian!” she said with contempt.

“Nay, you guess like a fool.”

“You”—she rose with slow, considered grace—“you talk like a slave.”

Doricot shook his head, smiling condescension.

“The sultana knows little of slaves. They allowed you none, doubtless. And yourself has not been a slave long enough. Patience, patience!”

She drew back from him, a veiled statue of pride; and there was another roaring cheer from the captured ship, and another bundle swayed in the air. To the shriek of the tackle it rushed down and came with a thud at Doricot's feet, and was disintegrated into two women. These had no mystery. Unveiled, coarsely clad, they were plainly slaves of little account. One was a negress or mulatto, shapeless, though she seemed young, the other white and old in years or in slavery. The mulatto lay wailing and rubbing herself till the veiled woman flung an order at her. Then she staggered to her feet and stood trembling. The other slave showed neither pain nor fear on her wasted face. With dull eyes she stared at Doricot.

Doricot began to laugh.

"The world mocks you, sultana. This morning these were your slaves. Now, behold you are slave to them! Go, wash their feet."

"You do not know how little you are, little man," she said coldly. "What can you do? Kill me? Kill me, then!"

"If I find it will help me, sultana, I will kill you with great content. But first I will try what you can do for me alive. As to our fair friends here, you need not be their body-servant—yet." He called a seaman and bade him take the two slaves below. "Give me your hand." She hesitated, holding aloof; but when he plucked her arm out of her robe, made no resistance. He looked down at the hand hardly darker than his own, long and shapely, with nails stained rosy. "So. You are not black, then. That is well."

She stamped her foot and screamed:

"Boor!"

Doricot laughed and drew her away from the gaping seamen and their noise to the silent twilight of the stern walk.

"Now, sultana. From whose harem do you come, or for whose were you bound?"

"I do not answer slaves."

Doricot shrugged.

"You are a fool in grain. If I ask you without a cord about your head, or a match between your fingers, it is but to save myself trouble."

"No torture would make me speak!" she cried.

"You may be even such a fool as that. For a zecchin either of your slaves would tell me all that you can tell."

She snatched herself away from him and stood with heaving bosom.

"I am called Arsace, and I come a gift from the Sultan Soliman to Dragut Reis. Be sure Dragut will hunt you down and have vengeance for this."

"Are you worth it?" quoth Doricot coldly. "Let me see your face." As she drew away he caught her veil. "Come, shall I be your tirewoman?"

She gave a passionate cry, and then tore the veil aside and showed him a Greek face of rich beauty, all aflame with rage.

"You will serve," said Doricot coldly. "You may go down to your sisters."

She started back, surprise in her anger now.

"Ah, you are not a man, you are a Christian!"

She tossed her head, and her hands worked nervously, and she stared out over the sea.

Doricot laughed.

"Do you think I should bow down to your pink and white? I am for better things."

But as she gazed eastward into the gathering dark her look, her bearing changed. She turned to him, all sign of anger gone, eager, cajoling.

"You make me ashamed, signor. You humble me. For less than I have said to you a Turk would have had me flogged till I bled. And I am your slave. Do not use me hard. Do not put me in chains."

She fell down and kissed his feet.

Doricot looked down at her with a sneering smile.

"Madonna! what dogs they make of their women!" he said in English, and then in the *patois*: "Chains? Not I, lass. You are worth too much."

"My lord will not use me hardly?" she sighed. "Indeed, I cannot bear it. I am used to soft lying and ease."

"Ay, that's how you're bred," quoth Doricot with contempt. "Come down. You shall have a cabin, you and your women."

"My women may be with me?" she cried. "My lord, you are noble to your slave."

"Have done," quoth Doricot, and then in English: "Before I liked you, but now you make me sick." So he turned her over to a youngster and bade him lock the three of them in the cabin next his own and give them all they needed.

The darkness of a clear night was coming down. The boatswain shouted for lanterns. Doricot called to him to make an end, and paced the poop watching the sky to windward, though

the wind was almost gone. Then Dick at his elbow drawled out:

"You'm taking a wife or so, seemly."

"Yes, my lord; I never take less than three at once." Doricot spoke carelessly. He had checked and was staring through the gloom. He ran to the starboard quarter and yelled an order to the boatswain: "All hands aboard! All hands aboard! Douse your lights, Antony. Rot and burn you for lubberly knaves! Aboard, I say! Lights out, there!"

The men began to swarm back, chattering noisily. Younkers ran up the rigging and hither and thither, and soon the *Toby*, which had been aflame as though a flight of stars were setting upon her, lay dark.

Dick, looking where Doricot had looked, saw, far off, dark craft low in the water, rigged in no fashion that he knew, for their sails were like birds' wings. They seemed to move more swiftly than the failing wind.

He turned to ask Doricot why they should bring panic, but Doricot was down in the waist talking to the boatswain. Already the Turkish ship was cast off, already the younkers were up aloft making sail. The last of the captured cargo was tumbled hastily below. The gunner was mustering his men again.

Under full sail the *Toby* began to move slowly. Dick turned to look for the strange craft astern. Each moment it was darker and he could hardly make them out. But it seemed they were gaining. He heard Doricot say: "Keep close. Cover your matches," and Doricot and the boatswain climbed to the poop.

"What's yon?" said Dick, pointing.

Doricot peered through the gloom and swore at the wind.

"What's yon?" Dick said again.

"Galleys, you fool," the boatswain grunted. "Here's a pretty business, surely." He whistled dolefully. "We'm nought against they, Captain. They'm the big chaps. Four hundred to each of 'em, to my thinking."

Doricot stamped.

"Give me a wind and I'll sink every galley that ever came out of Algiers."

"The Lord hath no mind to do such, seemly," quoth the boatswain. "Please the Lord they'll miss we. I'll go see we be all dark."

Dick knew enough to know the danger. The galleys of the Moorish pirates were to seamen who ventured into the Medi-

terranean like a pestilence. If chance were kind, a ship might not meet them, but if they came down upon a ship no skill nor daring could save her. In rough weather, indeed, they were impotent. With a brisk wind a cunning captain could, unless he were caught on a leeshore, hold his own or do better. But in calm or light winds they had over sailing-ships the mastery of steam. They could manœuvre at will while their prey waited them immobile. They could come down upon her when they chose and as they chose.

Two hundred slaves or more heaved at a big galley's oars. Two hundred fighting men crowded forecastle and stern. They carried light guns and few, for it was not gunnery that won their fights. If they were hard pressed, they might dash their beaked bows into a ship and so make an end. But for the most part they chose to run alongside and set their swarms of fighting men aboard the enemy. No ship upon the seas, save the huge fighting craft of Genoa and Venice and the Knights of Malta (and from them the galleys fled at speed), could hope for victory then. None could muster a crew to stand against the numbers of the Moors. It must be one to five at best, more likely one to ten, and a fight against wild creatures who knew no fear of death, no care for life, who in the frenzy of fight were unchecked by the ghastliest wounds.

For those whom they took alive there waited the slavery of the *bagnio*, wearing toil for masters who made cruelty their sport, or a harder life still chained on the galley bench, naked to the sun and wind and spray, tortured always by hunger and thirst, heaving and straining at the oars beneath the lash that would cut deeper and deeper as the body weakened till it had carved a way for death.

The *Toby* lay dark and silent, hardly moving for all her spread of sail. Her guns were manned and ready, and all her crew stood to arms along the bulwarks. From the poop Doricot and Dick peered astern. The galleys were lost in the dark, but the beat of their oars came clear and nearer and still nearer.

"Sink them! they are steering straight upon us," Dorico muttered. "*Teufelshölle*, do we show a light, then?"

He was rushing forward when the boatswain came puffing up.

"They women had a lantern by their porthole," he panted. "Young Billy Matthews give they a light. Said as you bade un give all they axed for. The one in the veil seed a lantern and snatched un as he took she down."

Doricot bit his teeth on an oath.

"You had it doused?" he said. He understood now the sudden change in madame's manners. Doubtless she had caught sight of the galleys while she kept him in play, and made her plan to give them signal. She was yet more Oriental than he had thought.

"Please God the heathen ha' not seen it," said the boatswain.

There was no answer. They listened to the oar-beat nearer and nearer yet, and heard above it the yells of the overseers, the whistle of their whips.

"Straight upon us," Doricot muttered "Line ahead," and he looked at the boatswain.

"Line ahead," the boatswain agreed gruffly. The galleys were straight astern and one behind the other, so that only if the *Toby* could turn from her course could she bring a gun to bear.

Doricot sprang round and caught the wheel and spun it. The ship had no steerage way and could not answer.

"Fire down into them as they came alongside!" he yelled.

Then the galleys came, shooting up on either quarter with a sudden storm of noise, grappling-irons crashing, the oars straining and groaning with a great gurgle of water, amid the wild battle-shouts of the Moors. Suddenly, as lanterns were plucked from hiding, the long, low hulls flamed light, and were seen teeming with men, crowded and busy as a startled ant-heap. The grappling-irons were hardly fast in the *Toby* before the Moors came swarming up her sides, climbing like cats where there was no foothold, in a mad haste, yet marvellously adroit.

Doricot shouted for his gunners, and on the port side they contrived to depress the long pieces enough to fire down into the heart of the galley. Then there was tumult in her and she fell off. But the starboard guns could not be brought to bear on the other, and in a moment the *Toby* was flooded with her swordsmen.

There was no more firing, for the gun-crews were cut down before they could load again. There was no fighting, for the *Toby's* scanty company were whirled back and beaten down beneath the weight of numbers that could have crushed them without stroke of scimitar or spear. A crowded medley of white coats and steel almost as white, spear and scimitar and corselet, a tempest of shrill shouts, a moment's hacking and hewing and thrusting, with heart and head athrob as though

they must break, a moment's consciousness of swarthy faces distorted and foaming—then nothingness. No more than that any man of her crew could have told of the capture of the *Toby*.

CHAPTER IX

ABOARD THE GALLEY

WHEN Dick woke he was beneath dead men. He thrust up through them, and as the mist was drawn from his eyes and dizziness left him he heard splashing and saw the Moors casting the corpses of his shipmates into the sea. Before he could rise, before he knew what wounds he had, lean swarthy arms grasped at him and he was dragged along the deck, over weapons and blood. He began to struggle as his strength came back, but a blow fell upon his mouth and a dark face bent over him hissing, and he was shown a dagger. His will yielded and he fell limp, and they bound him and flung him overboard.

A jerk that seemed for a moment to shake head from body surprised him with the knowledge that he was not yet to drown. He found himself hanging at the end of a rope over the galley. He looked down upon the crowded slaves, and the rope was paid out swiftly, and he shot down among them, to be brought up with a jerk again, and seized and flung down upon the deck. A Moor knelt upon him and cut the rope from him, leaving him lashed and helpless. He was flung down a hatch into fetid darkness. He fell on something softer than wood, and heard a grunt, and as he bounced on harder stuff an oath.

"You'm Doricot, to be sure," he said. "Who's the fat one?"

"You fell on me, fool," the alderman grunted.

"T' alderman's peevish, lad. Singing for his supper, as you might say."

This was the boatswain's husky voice.

"It's a wicked thing!" the alderman cried. "They take us and despoil us, and then fling us to starve in this den. Filthy heathen!"

"To be sure, how many be we?" Dick cried.

"Four with you," quoth the boatswain. "Ben't enough to man an oar for them. There's a pity!"

"We are enough to do something yet," said Doricot in a low voice. "Nick Doricot is among you."

"Oh, you're clever at finding a way if you were not so good at losing it," the alderman grumbled. "Twenty thousand pound we had at sunset!" He groaned again.

"It was the heathen's at dawn," the boatswain chuckled. "And now it's the heathen's again. Aw, it's a wicked thing, a see-saw."

But Doricot said: "Twenty lives we had that are gone. I keep my own accounts, mynheer."

Just then a light came over the hatch, and they saw a face too pale to be a Moor's.

"Which of you dogs is the captain?" it said in the Greek-Italian *patois*.

"If your captain would ask my pardon, renegado, go and fetch him," quoth Doricot.

The face vanished and they heard an order given. Bearing lanterns, two negroes, all but naked, slid through the hatch and caught Doricot and hoisted him up and vanished after him.

He was carried, so he told them in the long days that came after, to the galley's great cabin. The negroes set him down kneeling and shrank out. He could not stand, for his legs were bound, and he did not care to kneel to anything in this world, so he rolled over and lay at his ease, leaning against the bulkhead. There was laughter, and as his eyes grew used to the light he saw the veiled woman sitting on a divan, and her slaves standing beside. Two men sat opposite her, one a big, loose-made fellow of bushy black beard, the other smaller but very square, with beard and moustaches lank and oiled—a Greek, if his face told true. Both were richly clad and bejewelled on turban and breast. The cabin was a mass of luxury. Silks and brocades hung and fell in gaudy disorder. There were things of silver and gold on the table, and in corners on the floor lay others. The table blazed with lamps.

"Is this the little dog?" the Greek said.

"It lies there," said the woman, and gave a little cruel laugh.

"Ha, slave," quoth Doricot with a grin, "have you found some to like your sleek face better than I did?"

She turned to the mulatto behind her.

"Go, strike him on the mouth till it bleeds." And, when it was done: "So we whip curs," she said, and laughed again.

"It is marvellous," said Doricot, "how you always make

yourself despicable." One of the men barked a threat at him. "Your turn shall come, nigger," he said placidly, and looked at the woman again. "Prithee, go on! I like you better in this hangman vein than cowering and cringing at my feet. There is something to laugh at now."

"Cringe!" she laughed out loud. "Little proud fool, do you not know yet how I trapped you? Do you think I would have spoken you one fair word but to cheat you and ruin you? Why, it was these galleys of Dragut's that made me cringe, not your little, strutting folly. I saw them while you saw nothing, my great sea captain, and played with you to win myself the chance of making them signal. It was the light you gave me that brought them down on you. It's I who have beaten you and have you there to make me sport."

Doricot shrugged as well as he could in his bonds, and looked at the men.

"What do you niggers do with a crowing hen?"

The Greek began to laugh.

"What shall we do with you, my friend? There's enough for you to think of. Flay you, or hang you on the hooks, or bleed you? If we keep you for Dragut, he'll burn you finger by finger."

"What!" Doricot cried quickly. "What, because I did not rid him of that woman? Now that is hard measure. But God knows I'll not blame the man. I have seen her face."

The men looked at each other and at the woman, and at each other again. It was obvious that they found Doricot's method startling. The woman quivered.

"Yes, you have seen me unveiled, dog," she said in a low voice. "Dragut will not forgive you that."

"I'll not blame him," quoth Doricot. "If I had to take a wife like you, I would have no man see my misfortune."

She turned passionately on the men.

"Will you let me hear this?" she cried. "Is the dog to live?"

"You bade him here," said the Turk stolidly.

"He is for Dragut, not us," quoth the Greek, and clapped his hands. When the negroes entered: "Bear him back to the others," he said.

Doricot nodded to the men as he was borne out.

"My good fellows, I am sorry for you."

As he went he heard the woman's voice shrill. He was well

satisfied with himself. Now Dragut's men knew, and Dragut must be told, what the woman would have kept secret—that a man had seen her unveiled. Therefore, they would not kill him, but save him for Dragut. It might mean a far worse death, but at least it meant some days more life, and it must mean that Dragut would have none of the woman. For a man had seen her unveiled, a man had mocked at her naked face. She was no more worthy to be a pasha's wife. She was paid.

He was thrown back upon his companions in the shallow, nauseous hold.

"What's the news with you?" Dick said.

"Only madame wanted to make love to me," quoth Doricot, and wriggled to lay himself more easily. "I am for sleep."

Sleep was hard to win. Not only hunger and thirst, not only the cramp and pain of their bonds troubled them, but overhead there was every moment the clank of chains as the slaves stirred and turned on their benches. Louder than the chain clank came groaning. Some wretch, wounded or smarting from the whip, or in the torture of one of the thousand diseases that haunted the galleys, had lost all mastery of himself.

For hours, as it seemed, they listened. The boatswain swore at the groans jovially. The alderman had gone to sleep, and Dick was dozing, when there came a clear, imperious voice. Doricot sat up. It was the veiled woman.

"The noise disturbs me, I say. See that it ends at once." Then a murmur, then a smooth: "It shall end, madame," and the woman's voice: "See that it be done, Lucia."

Heavy steps overhead and a faint gleam of lantern light across the hatch, then a clang of metal, a shriek, and a splash. The groaning ceased.

"What is it now?" said Dick drowsily.

"They ha' flung the poor devil overboard in his chains. Why, he was spoiling madame's beauty sleep."

"There's a wench," Dick drawled. "Something fell down the hatch. What now?" he cried.

"Silent!" Doricot hissed.

He began to wriggle along the planks, feeling slowly, laboriously with his body. He lay upon what he sought. His hand closed on the helve of an axe.

You imagine how his heart jumped. But he made no sound. He turned and pressed the edge on the rope that bound him.

He was free and stretching his limbs and rubbing them. Back he came to the others.

"No man speaks a word but I," he whispered, and set them free. "Now will we free the slaves," he said. "Follow. Who makes a sound as we go cuts his own throat."

On the boatswain's back he stood and peered warily out of the hatch. The lanterns were gone. There was no light save at bow and stern. No one moved among the oar benches. There was no sound but the endless clank of the chains as the sleepers stirred and turned. He hauled himself up, and Dick after him, and, leaving the others to do their own business, crept forward, scanning the slaves keenly. By a brawny fellow amidships he paused, and put a hand on the naked shoulder, murmuring in *patois*:

"Friend, friend. One of the English come to set you free. I've a hatchet. If I split the bench, can you do the rest? Silent, silent!"

The man gave a hoarse chuckle and muttered in his comrade's ear, and he again to the next, till the whole oar's crew were told. They were chained to the bench by body and leg, but since they must have freedom to row, not closely.

"Clank your chains—clank your chains!" Doricot muttered and swung the axe, and the sound of the blow was lost. Again he struck, and again, and then as the whole oar's crew flung themselves on their chains together, the bench split and the bolts were torn out and they were free, save that their chains must go with them where they went.

"Can you find tools and weapons?" Doricot muttered. "We must free the rest, or you are lost."

The big man whom he had roused first clapped him on the shoulder.

"Be easy, brother—be easy," he said, and took a great piece of the broken bench and ran forward.

"The others, the others!" one gasped at Doricot's elbow, and to the next bench he went.

By this time Dick and the boatswain and the alderman were up with him, and over his shoulder he said:

"Keep close about me. We'll give the heathen what will keep them busy," and he swung the hatchet again, and another crew was loosed.

Back came the big man panting, with a scimitar under his arm and mallet and chisel.

"I ha' broke the sentry's head, brother," he gasped. "Here be the tools from the locker. And none heard but him that's dead."

"Fall to it," cried Doricot, "fall to it!"

The big man turned on the men who were free and swore at them.

"Get forward and kill, I say. What, would you have the wire in your flesh again? Get forward and kill!"

"Let some go aft," Doricot called, and swung his hatchet again; and, breaking themselves clubs from the benches, forward and aft they went, breathing deep.

Now full half the slaves were awake and aware. Yet they made little noise. There was a murmur of eager talk, but no more, no cries nor shouting. On the galley benches a man learnt to wait or died, and calmly they waited the will of this man of miracle. Once free, the most of them were transfigured. They thrust upon one another and struggled in the narrow way to come at their masters quickly. But still they spoke little. There was no time, no use for words till they had their vengeance.

On platforms fore and aft the Moorish swordsmen lay, almost as crowded as their slaves. The first of these freed slaves fell to work and clubbed and slew men who still slept; but soon there was alarm, soon a trumpet sounded, and shouts rose and the clash of arms. By that the first of the slaves had won arms from the dead. Each minute brought others to aid them. The fight was without mercy or honour. The slaves had nothing to fear save being taken alive. They had dark cruelty to avenge. Man for man—since they were men who had lived through the toil of the oar—they overmatched the Moors. In numbers, as each moment brought them reinforcement from the crowded benches, they had the advantage. It was not a butchery. The Moors fought desperately. But it was more like a fight of wild beasts than a fight of men.

Before all the slaves were freed Doricot gave over the work to their comrades, and with his little company close about him pushed forward.

"Leave the bulls to the dogs, my lads," quoth he. "A boat now—where's a boat?"

They found one stowed inboard just forward of the oars, and, while the fight in the bows roared on above them, they had her into the water and dropped over side.

The other ships were waking. From the second galley

lanterns waved in signal and shouts came again and again. There was no answer but the crash and growl of the fight. Lights moved on the *Toby*, and her new crew hailed their comrades wildly. Doricot chuckled.

"Shout—ay, shout again. Peradventure they sleep and must be awakened."

Standing in the stern of the boat, he fisted her along the galley's side.

"What be doing?" Dick cried.

"Who bade you speak?" quoth Doricot. "Give me an oar, booby."

They were under the portholes of the great cabin, from which broad bands of light streamed over the sea. For a moment Doricot's keen face stood out white. Then he moved aside and raised the oar-blade. The glass of the porthole was shattered. He called out:

"What, Arsace! What, Madame Arsace!"

In the roar of the fight above he hardly heard his own voice.

But the veiled woman came to the porthole and looked out. For a moment, as she stood in the light and he in the darkness, she could not see him, and she cried in a clear, quivering voice:

"Who is it? Who calls?"

"Come and see," Doricot laughed. "Come and see and be saved."

At that moment Dick caught his ankle with a "That's a pretty thing, now. Ha' done and sit down and give way." But Doricot dropped the oarloom on his knuckles.

The woman had drawn back a little and stood muttering to herself. Behind her Doricot saw the worn, white face of the elder of her slaves. It was smiling.

"I have played out your game, my lass," Doricot laughed. "I ha' freed myself. I ha' freed the slaves. They'll be upon you swiftly. Come, there's no life for you but here. *Madre Dios*, not Barbarossa himself was ever worse to Christian woman than the gallerians to a Turkish lass that they win. Come, I say."

But she drew back again, muttering:

"You freed them! You won free!"

Doricot laughed. As the boat rose on the swell and he swayed with her, he held out his arms into the beam of light.

"Come, child, I've no malice, God help you."

But there was no answer from behind the veil. She stood

there in the light and all her body seemed shrunken. She fumbled at her girdle. "You freed them," she muttered again. "You won free!" She drew in her breath noisily.

"I gave him the axe!" It was a voice quivering with passion and hate. Arsace whirled round, she was at her full height again, tense and fierce. The old slave came to meet her bosom to bosom, and shook and chuckled as she spoke. "Ay, my kind mistress, ay, my chick, I set him free. There was never a one till he came who dared flout you and mock you. Oh, it fed my soul to hear him. And now—now you shall know worse before you die. I thank the good God! Ay, my sweet mistress, they'll pay my debts to-night. Thank God, I have broken you in the end."

A moment they stood against each other, the tall virginal form very still and the slave's heavy shape unsteady with ugly laughter. Then Arsace drew back and struck, and the two swayed and struggled together while the slave shrieked out a ghastly tale of the vengeance to come.

Overhead the din of the fight was broken with mad yells of triumph. There was a scurry of feet and shouts: "The women! The women!" and then a thunder at the door of the cabin. Arsace tore herself free and rushed to the weapons that hung upon the bulkhead.

Doricot shouted passionately:

"Come, fools, come to me and I'll save you."

But the slave cried:

"Go your ways, Englishman. Your work's done. She's not for you, nor I neither," and she rushed upon the woman, who was putting a scimitar to her breast. "You shall not kill yourself!" she shrieked. "Your father struck me down when I would have killed myself, when he flogged my husband to death. You shall not kill yourself, I say! You, too, you shall be a slave. Ah, my God, I have lived for this!"

So they were locked about the scimitar when the gallerians broke in.

But already, with a mutter of "Here's enough of your games," Dick had pushed the boat off and bent to his oars. Doricot sat himself down, grumbling and muttering to himself.

As they drew away a fresh sound came over the water. In the second galley was the groaning of cable and capstan. They could see her moving up to her anchor.

"It's up anchor, is it?" Doricot said, and then lifted up his

voice: "Gallerians! Ahoy, gallerians! Cut your cable! Out with your oars! You have the other galley upon you!" Then he turned fiercely upon his own crew, who were resting again on their oars. "Give way, curse your folly—give way! Do you want to be caught between them?"

On both galleys there was a fever of scurrying and shouting. Through the dawn twilight they could see the oars thrust out. Almost at the same moment both began to move.

The Moors, it was plain, intended their usual tactics to grapple and board. Whether the slaves meant what they did Doricot professed always that he could not guess. For, just as it seemed that the Moors would run alongside, as they sought, the other galley altered her course, and bow to bow, beak upon beak, they crashed and were jammed together. Even so, the Moorish swordsmen swarmed from forecastle to forecastle, but as they came the locked bows dipped and dipped, and Doricot cried:

"They're sinking, by Heaven—they're sinking!"

Still the fight raged. In a moment there was one great roar of despair as the water rose to the crowded benches. But still on the high forecastle the fight raged; still the Moors pressed fiercely on as though there were something to be won by victory, something lost by defeat; still the gallerians strove against them as though there were danger they might fail of their vengeance, and to the clash and yell of the fight the galleys sank together.

The mellowing light fell upon a sea where, beneath the tall ships' shadow, there floated only a little scattered timber.

In the blaze of noon four men stood on the beach watching the sails of the *Toby* far away.

"There goes twenty thousand pound," said the alderman gloomily.

"There goes beef and beer," the boatswain chuckled.

"What's to do?" said Dick.

"There's Alexandria," quoth Doricot, "and a man that's my brother to come out o' prison."

"We be near as naked as we were born," the alderman grumbled.

"The better the venture!" cried Doricot. "Without a ship, without a weapon, *en avant, mon ami, en avant!*"

CHAPTER X

THE OPEN BOAT

OF his own impulse Dick would have had no part in it. He was not made for the infinite ambitions of pride and faith. More than once in his life he chose to risk it for no gain, but not without some ponderable chance of success, not without some strong motive or duty or passion or rage. It was not in him to make a venture which the boldest reason must call impossible. It was not of his soul to fling his hopes of this world away in a mad charge for a cause to which he was not bound. And if not of him, still less of those sturdy sceptical comrades, the boatswain and the alderman. The honour of it all is Nicholas Doricot's. Not John Hawkins nor Francis Drake, not Hugh Willoughby nor Humphrey Gilbert bore higher heart or will more dominant than the captain of these four men who sailed their open boat from Tripoli to Alexandria in the year Queen Mary died.

That boat was no bigger than a whaler and, you may be sure, less seaworthy. She was furnished with such dregs of food and water and tackle as they could find aboard a battered, plundered Turkish ship. They made a voyage of a thousand miles and more along an unknown, harbourless, barren coast, with nothing but courage and chance to assure them fresh provision of water and food. It was as great a deed as that run home from San Juan d'Ulloa with half a crew of battered men in a battered ship. And the end of this venture could be nothing but a venture yet more perilous.

How they got out of Alexandria again is one of the greatest stories of the world. But that is in the chronicles. There is nowhere more than a sentence or two about the voyage. Richard Rymingtonne, who had a sufficient interest in his own life and a proper admiration for his captain, Nick Doricot, dismissed this business curtly. His papers do not expand into detail till they have brought us to Alexandria. But it was as wonderful for the four adventurers to get there as to get out again. How Doricot made them go his way is the secret of a man born for mad hopes and imperious command and glorious failure. They must have seen the folly of it. That four men should dash themselves upon the forts of Alexandria to rescue an English-

men from the bagnio was plainly no better than co-operative suicide. They had no call of honour. The prisoner was nothing to any one of them save Doricot. They could have sailed their boat for Malta and made sure of safety under the banner of the Knights. But Doricot bade them through madness to wilder madness, and they obeyed.

So by a miracle of will and courage to Alexandria they came. It was in the noon glare that they first had sight of the shafts of Pharos and pillar, vague as the hot air quivered in waves, and all about them, like a dream city built of cloud, crowded houses and arsenal, and forts embraced by the sea. But they had seen many a city before as like the real as this—cities which vanished when a man drew near—cities of mirage. It only moved them to break a poor joke or two upon Doricot.

"Fairyland, ahoy! Here's another o' your fancy towns, Cap'n. Bid un wait for 'e now, do 'e, this time." And Doricot nodded and said:

"Carry on, carry on."

He believed in his eyes, perhaps, no more than any other of that shrunken, scorched company, but he still believed in his will. That city, like all the rest, might fade into wastes of scorching sand; that night, like many another, might find their bodies sleepless in the torture of thirst; morning might dawn with a pitiless sky, and the day be spent in wild, mind-breaking search for stream or spring or pool on the barren shore. But that day would follow day without relief, that hope and effort and purpose were all mirage luring them to a useless death, he never thought of fearing, and though they mocked and grumbled, his proud constancy commanded their souls too.

All day long, as the boat slid slow through an oily sea, the vague city stayed in sight, and when the sun fell behind them and the reverberating air grew still, tower and pinnacle and wall and the jumble of houses were seen solid, glowing stone, sharp against sky and sea. Then three of them began to chatter about it eagerly, which was fort and which the old harbour, and which the mole, and which the bagnio. But Dick, who had the tiller, growled out:

"Now we'm seeing what fools we be," and when they turned upon him, "Will I run her nose on that great tower yonder?"

Doricot laughed.

"If I had a hundred the like of you, my lad, I'd take the whole heathen town."

"Being as it is, the heathen be more like to take we," Dick grumbled.

Doricot laughed again and took the tiller, and they ran the boat ashore and made a meal of dates and dried fish and water from a brackish pool, and slept on the sand.

Morning found three of them still happy with excitement. Doricot strutted about his bathing with elasticity. He felt himself already the whirling victor of impossible achievements. The boatswain and the alderman, it is to be suspected, apart from some small capacity for imbibing intoxication from him, owed their enthusiasm to the prospect of coming again into the world, of moving among other men again. For they were tired of each other, and their lonely boat and desolate shores. But Richard Rymingtowne, whose ascetically practical mind cared for none of these things, remained morose.

It was his way to see difficulties and expect danger. Far more clearly than any other man of them he saw the ultimate madness of the venture. I suppose, for all his reluctant, compelled worship of Doricot's spirit, he had by this time no faith in the man's brain. He followed to the last because he could do no other. He revered to the end and after. But as a leader of men he much preferred himself.

When they hid their boat in the sand and started to fetch a compass about the city, he followed at Doricot's heel like a dog, but a sullen dog. Doricot designed to come in from the eastern side, where the harbour for foreign ships was, and to learn the ways of Alexandria, and gather such information as they could, posing as Greek seamen or Levantines. After their scorching and hard fare they looked the parts well enough.

The Alexandria to which they came was little like the busy port of our time, still less the teeming city of palaces of the ancient world. On the verge and in the very midst were great spaces of empty buildings falling to ruin. Only the arsenal and the forts and the bagnio stood sound and strong. Its quays, its streets, were idle; its bazaars were shabby, mean, colourless. It had lost its business and its wealth. In the foreign harbour lay nothing but a few small Levantine feluccas. It was only on the other side of the Isthmus, where slaves toiled on the mole, where the galleys were drawn high on the beach and slaves scoured their hulls, that there was life and vigour. Alexandria was little but a dockyard of pirates.

Since one stranger makes less mark in a town than a com-

pany, Doricot bade his scatter, yet keep him always in sight. But there was little need of such caution. Few looked twice at them. A Greek, an Italian sailor was nothing strange in the sleepy streets. It seemed as if no mortal race could be strange there. The people of Alexandria were in all shades of colour from black to white, in all kinds of dress from the nearly nothing that emphasized a sleek black body to the heavy elaborate gaberdines of Jews from Turkestan. There were thin-shanked negroes and sturdy fellaheen of sullen, stolid brown faces, both all but naked, and in among them Italians with all the glory of ruff and trunk hose. There were lithe Arabs and little timid, nervous Greeks, and yellow, hairless Mongol slave-dealers, and here and there a huge fair-haired Slav from the Balkans or the Euxine. But though the races were many, there were not many people to count. They were all idle and listless, as though in Alexandria there was nothing to do or hear or see. Even the Jews lounged and shuffled and dawdled as they went their way. There was not even chaffering in the bazaars. The shops offered a scanty, mean stock, and none of the loiterers seemed to have will or means to buy, none of the squatting, smoking merchants any desire to sell. The city had no life.

Except in its hard-driven slaves and their pirate masters. On the forts that towered over the western harbour, on the shapeless mass of the arsenal, on the square, surly ugliness of the bagnio, life enough had been spent and was being spent still. They bore no sign of weakness or decay or sloth. Their walls stood sound and strong. All about them, to the very crevices in the stones, was swept and garnished with womanly precision. They were kept as only a place can be kept when human flesh is used without thrift or mercy. They made a queer, grim contrast to the decay and filth, the listless idleness of all the rest of the town.

Doricot, who had bidden his little company play the fool in a bazaar till he called them out of it, strutted past the forts and as near the bagnio as he dared, marked the gates and the gaoler's house, and turned to the harbour. He stood a little while watching the horde of slaves labouring naked in the glare about the galleys. Among them overseers lounged, striking here and there wantonly. Doricot saw lines of blood break red on the white backs. That was the life of his friend.

He came back to his men in the bazaar, and, "Now I know Alexandria," said he, and therewith turned into a shop which

displayed nothing but a few trinkets of tarnished silver. Its master was a Jew. He blinked at Doricot from the floor and pulled himself to his feet and made salaam. Doricot, chattering bad Italian very fast, held out in the palm of his hand a gold coin, an English angel. It was to be understood that he had won it from a seaman at Rhodes over the dice-box; that it was French and worth two hundred aspers. Would Father Abraham change it for him?

Father Abraham peered at it and weighed it in his hand, and peered at it again and shook his head. He lamented that Doricot had been deceived by a godless man. The thing was not worth two hundred aspers or one. Not French but English. Doricot laughed scornfully. English? Who ever heard of anything English in the Levant? No Englishman had ever been seen east of Venice. Father Abraham was trying to cheat him.

Father Abraham called upon the name of God for strength to survive his amazement. Why, month after month the galleys towed English ships into harbour. The bagnio was full of English slaves.

Doricot called Father Abraham the father of lies. "Show me an Englishman in Alexandria and I'll eat him."

Father Abraham compared him to the children who mocked at the prophet and were eaten by the bear.

Doricot called Father Abraham a prevaricator. There might indeed be Englishmen in the place come upon a matter of trade, come for a cargo with the warrant and safe-conduct of Sultan Soliman, even as he had come and men of every race came the year round. But English prisoners—English slaves! He did not believe that one breathed in Alexandria.

"Alas, my son, what you will believe, you Christians, what you will not believe, I cannot tell. For you are ruled by your desires and not wisdom or truth."

Doricot called Father Abraham a wordy infidel. The English were fierce devils, who would never be taken alive, who would not brook slavery. Not an Englishman was ever born who would obey a Moslem. They were not craven Jews.

It was the Jew's turn to laugh. "Oh, oh, they were all brave! Yes, they are all lions! Not like a poor old Jew! They will fight till they die! They will not bow themselves! They are no slaves. Nay, by my beard! They will not lick your feet and betray their brothers!" He cackled venomously.

"Why, how now, old gentleman? What maggot's bit you? I know the English. They are as brave as bulls. You are a dreamer. You babble. Tell me now, did you ever see an Englishman since you were born?"

"Nay, my lord, I never saw one," the Jew sneered. "I know nothing. I spake out of my emptiness and folly, as is the way of age."

"Why, now you are witty!" Doricot clapped him on the shoulder. "But to it again. Did ever you know an Englishman?"

"Indeed, it seemed to my poor wits, good sir, that I knew one. But beyond a doubt he is even as you say, that my lord of the *Golden Lion*. Prithee, go to him and tell him how brave he is, my son. Surely he will welcome you."

Doricot stiffened. Here was news indeed, and something more than he had played for. The *Golden Lion* was the ship of his friend Matt Winkfield. Why should the Jew choose to jeer at Winkfield's courage? But he showed only careless impatience.

"What have I to do with your *Golden Lions*? Why do you babble useless lies? I know the English. A breed of savage fools. As for their wits——" He snapped his fingers. "But brave to madness—all the world knows that."

"Ay, ay, young men know all things! Oh, yes, he has no wits, my lord of the *Golden Lion*. Oh, yes; he is madly brave! That is how he lives in his fine house."

Doricot wondered more and more. But he had no mind to wake Jewish suspicions. So he became impatient.

"To the fiend with you and your *Golden Lion*! How much for my French coin?"

"For your English angel," the Jew sniffed, "fifty aspers."

Then they higgled a little while, till Doricot went grumbling off with fifty-one. He found his men gaping dutifully where they had been left. But Dick stared hard at him and drawled out:

"You'll ha' been cheated."

"I wonder," Doricot muttered. One of the many donkeys laden with fruit shouldered past him, and he turned to its driver and began to buy a pumpkin. If any one knew all the houses of Alexandria it must be the pedlars of fruit. His questions hid craftily what he had in mind—so craftily that the first lad and the next and the next gave him only useless answers. He

had wandered through half a score of streets—every man of his company had a pumpkin to carry—before a fragile little Copt told him of a stranger, a Ferangi, a yellow-haired man, a seaman captured by the galleys, who had a house by the ruin of Hadrian's wall towards the Catacombs. Then Doricot began to bite his lips.

CHAPTER XI

MATT WINKFIELD

IN the shade of the ruins they ate onions and pumpkins. In the shade of the ruins they waited. There was no mistaking the house. It stood in the midst of desolation. All about it were others empty and falling to wreck. In their courtyards and gardens a few hovels had been built of their decay. This one house alone made any pretence of life and use. It was in no other way distinguished, neither large nor small, neither splendid nor mean. The yellow stone walls were broken with courses of red and black. It had the common array of tiny barred windows below, and an overhanging upper storey with little perforated balconies. The door was low and narrow, and through the doorway they could see only a blank wall and a drowsy black negro.

When the shadows were falling long there came by the road from the city a man all in white, turban and loose tunic and trousers. He was followed by two negroes all shining black, save for the loincloth. Doricot whistled a little between his teeth. As the procession came near they saw that the man had a yellow beard. Doricot ran out of the shadow.

"Why, Matt, here's wonders!" said he.

The man started back.

Doricot laughed and held out his hand.

"How goes it?"

"What o' God's name brought you here?" said Winkfield in a low voice, drawing back still.

"You!" Doricot thrust the hand upon him.

He took it in a loose grip, staring and muttering:

"What do you want of me?"

"The devil!" Doricot cried. "I thought you was wanting me, my dear!"

Winkfield let his hand fall.

"What do you mean? What have you heard?"

"I heard you were a slave, Matt," said Doricot with a gentleness strange to his voice.

"Well, I am a slave," Winkfield cried angrily. "Do you think I am not a slave?"

"God bless you!" said Dick in the background, "you look more like a bashaw with fifty wives!"

Doricot turned on him.

"Who bade thee yelp, puppy?"

"These be your men?" Winkfield cried. "How many are you, then?"

"We be four men. Which heard you was taken by the heathen, and are come to save you and yours."

"You are mad," Winkfield muttered. He looked nervously about him. There was no one in sight save some fellaheen among the hovels, but he caught Doricot's arm and cried:

"Well, come in! We cannot talk here."

They went through the low doorway, and, turning, came into a paved courtyard where a fountain gleamed. In one corner the earth was bare, and a vine and fig-trees grew up lattice-work, making shade for a low stone bench strewn with cushions. Winkfield started that way and then checked, and muttering, "No, best within," brought them to a room with mosaic floor and panels of sandal-wood. He dropped upon a divan; the strength seemed to go out of his body, and he sat in a heap. "Well, sit, sit!" he cried petulantly. "You can sit yourselves down for sure." With some gaping at the worn splendour of the room, down they sat. He clapped his hands and a veiled woman darted in—a tiny creature all shimmering silk. He snapped something angry at her in Arabic, and she fled. After a moment an Egyptian lad came with a tray of coffee and yellow bread and little cakes.

"Ay, for a man that's a slave you ha' very pretty living," said Dick with a sniff.

Winkfield shifted on his cushions and scowled at him, and looked at Doricot and looked away again.

"Do you come here to mock me?" he said shrilly.

"Mock ye now!" Dick drawled. "To my thinking, 'tis you'm mocking we. We come nigh parching ourselves to death for to help a poor soul that is naked and chained and whipped, and here be you fat and kicking with black slaves and

brown and pretty girls to your whistle. Mock ye, says you! It's you has the laugh, my lad."

"Be silent you!" quoth Doricot over his shoulder. "But faith, Matt, the lads have gone through something to come to you, and here you are, mighty lordly. What's the way of it?"

"Why did you come?" said Winkfield.

"Why?" Doricot's brow proclaimed surprise. "Did you think Nick Doricot would hear of you a slave to these beastly heathen, and not make a venture to win you free? *Madre Dios*, we know each other, you and I."

"You were mad to come," said Winkfield gloomily.

"*S' il vous plait*," quoth Doricot. "But we're here."

Winkfield stared at the ground.

"Why, man, take heart." Doricot slapped him on the shoulder. "We'll have you on the sea for England before——"

Winkfield started and cried out:

"England! How can I go to England? I mean—why, you are mad."

Doricot shrugged.

"For what I see, you could sail to-night. To be sure, there's your crew."

"What do you mean? What do you know of my crew?" Winkfield cried fiercely.

"Less we know about the gentleman better he likes it, seemly," Dick drawled.

"Why, what's the matter?" said Doricot. "I see you ha' found a way to make yourself easy, but——"

"I tell you I am a slave. As much a slave as if they had me in the bagnio. And God knows, more. I am their slave, I say."

"'Tis a fat lie, seemly," quoth Dick.

"You are out of the bagnio at least," said Doricot with a frown. "They have your lads in it still."

"Is that my fault?" Winkfield snarled.

"Who says so?" Doricot was plainly surprised in him. "But there they are sweating their lives out under the lash, and you——" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Can I help it?" Winkfield cried petulantly. "Besides, they be most of them dead. The better for them."

"There's what I'd never say," quoth Doricot. "Most of them dead. Well, you're the captain of them all."

"What do you mean? We had four galleys upon us. We

were becalmed off Candia. They came upon us in the night. What was the use of fighting?"

Doricott frowned.

"*Mordieu*, but you fought your ship, Matt?"

"Fought till we were all down," Winkfield muttered, "and the most of us never got up again." Then suddenly he cried out, "I tell you I wish often I had been one of them." He turned his face away.

Doricot nodded, "I know."

Dick slunk silently out of the room.

"Still, you know, you ben't one of them," said the boatswain stolidly, "so why ben't you in the bagnio with t' others?"

Winkfield looked round with something furtive in his eyes. "The Turks let me out because I know their tongue, because I could interpret for them, because I could serve them in their traffics. I swear I am more a slave than any."

Doricot clicked his tongue. "So! Well, now, there's to get your lads out of the bagnio and sail away."

Winkfield lost breath.

"Out of the bagnio?" he gasped.

"Madonna, you would not leave the lads behind?" Doricot cried.

Winkfield stammered: "But you are mad—mad, I tell you. There's no way."

"I saw a dozen this morning. What the devil! There be slaves enough here to eat all the Turks and their forts atop." He laughed. "What a venture! And with you that know the Turks and their ways, and their speech, and go and come amongst them—why, it's fair wind and a clear sky." Winkfield started up. "Nay, man, sit down and we'll plan it all in an hour."

Winkfield stared at him as if he were raving.

"The forts," he said. "The guns. They have a thousand men ever under arms and more—yes, and more. Go and meddle with the slaves and they'll have you on the hooks in an hour."

"Not me, my lad," Doricot laughed. "Come, sit down and talk sense."

"You never mean it. You——"

"I mean it and I'll do it, and you shall help me, Matt."

"Oh, you're mad!" Winkfield cried, and stared at him a moment and turned away.

He fidgeted and fumbled with the iron-work of the window

and turned again laughing nervously. "You're a good fellow, Nick, a good fellow, I swear you are. And i' faith, I take it kindly of you. I know you mean me well." Here the boatswain guffawed. You conceive the amazement, the fierce contempt possessing Doricot. But Winkfield understood nothing. He went on in a hurry. "Yes, you mean me well. But the truth is you put me in peril. If it were known that I had here Christians without a safe conduct, my life must answer for it. Nay, Nick, you must be gone. Come, I am poor enough, but I can spare you a little money. I swear I will tell none of your coming."

"Not tell on us!" the boatswain roared. "Oh, you'm a merry man."

Doricot hissed out an oath. "What of your men that are whipped in the bagnio?"

"Is it my fault?" Winkfield said. "Do I not suffer? I have lost all. I tell you I can bear no more. I cannot." He was tearful and turned away.

Doricot sprang after him. "Come, Matt, they've broke your spirit, but we'll mend it again. You shall make a mock of all the pashas in Alexandria and all the power of Mahound."

"You are mad!" Winkfield cried again.

"Nay, not I. Come, sit down to the plan."

Winkfield made a gesture of despair. "I have done what I could," he muttered, and looked sadly at Doricot.

"Come, man, sit down."

A moment more Winkfield looked at him, then suddenly started away. "I have done what I could," he muttered again.

Doricot sprang after him. "Come, Matt. Come, sit down to the plan."

"No, I must go to the arsenal. I—it is an order. I dare not stay."

"Have with you, then!"

Again Winkfield stared at him before he spoke. "No, it is not safe. You must stay here. Keep close. You must not go out. It is not safe."

"*S'il vous plait*," Doricot shrugged. "When you come back, then."

Winkfield laughed drearily. "When I come back!" Then he looked round the room and gave a start. "Why, where's the other—the big fellow? Where has he gone?"

"Diccon?" Doricot looked. "Oh, after some mischief! It's a roguish lad. But never fear. Diccon can take care of himself."

"I will send a nigger after him," said Winkfield nervously, "lest he come to harm—lest he come to harm," and hurried out. He was so interested in Dick that he sent three.

Dick Rymingtowne was no farther away than the nearest heap of stones. That is doubtless why they did not find him. He saw them range away among the ruined houses, heard them chattering questions he did not understand, and guessed that they were looking for him, and chuckled. He saw Winkfield go off at a pace that was almost a run, and was pleased with himself. It is not to be supposed that he had any foresight of what was to happen, that he guessed what was in Winkfield's mind, or the object of his errand. If you ask why he slunk out of the room, and why he wanted to hide, the only answer is that Winkfield bred in him suspicion. He had not any notion what Mr. Winkfield had been doing, or what he was likely to do. He was entirely certain that the man had done something he was ashamed of, and if he saw his account in doing the like again, would not hesitate. Therefore Dick preferred to watch him from a convenient distance. To the prosperous end of his life, after much varied business with rascals, Dick Rymingtowne preserved for Matt Winkfield his bitterest contempt. Not because the man was a dirtier rascal than others, but because he was a rascal ashamed of his rascality, a rascal who kept his conscience alive for the sake of being uncomfortable.

Dick waited among the ruins, saw the negroes go back to the house, and the door shut behind them, and waited still while the twilight faded into dark. It had not been dark long before there came from the city a close-marching company. To the door of the house they came and halted, and Dick, peering through the gloom, saw weapons. When the door opened the light fell upon steel. They passed quickly in.

Perhaps he had a wild chivalrous impulse to rush to his friends, shout alarm, join them for better or worse. He was still young. It is more likely that he congratulated himself on his good sense in having run away. He was always passionately practical. Whatever was in his head, he lay still. He heard a little shouting, a little noise, and then out from the house the armed men came again, but more slowly, in some disorder. It was plain that they had in their midst prisoners who were giving trouble. The sound of threats and blows and scuffling broke the tramp of the march. Slowly they made for the city again, and were lost in the night. It may be that Dick thought for a moment of

rushing upon them, and daring the mad chance of a surprise. It is much more likely that he was thinking exclusively of Matt Winkfield.

For he understood very well what had happened. The excellent Winkfield must have hurried to the city to bring down the Turkish soldiery on Doricot, to get him safely chained to the bagnio. Why? There were reasons enough obvious. It was plain that by some trick of treachery Winkfield had won for himself the favour and bounty of the Turks, no less plain that he was afraid of any free Englishman coming to know of his prosperity. He had something foul to hide. He would be ready to bury Doricot alive for that. It was plain, too, that he was afraid Doricot's coming might make the Turks suspicious—afraid that Doricot might involve him in some dangerous venture. It was mere self-preservation to betray Doricot swiftly. Dick Rymingtowne, I suppose, might have admired the cold villainy of a man's selling to slavery the friend who had put life in peril to rescue him from that. But Dick happened to be engaged on the other side, and he never denied a debt of friendship or hate or cash. Also, the sickly conscience, the nervousness of Winkfield annoyed him vastly. So of Matt Winkfield he thought very hard, and from one of the gardens he stole a meal of cucumbers and onions and went to sleep.

For some days his history is a tale of petty theft and burglary. He was too cautious to go into the city by daylight, but he made up for his idleness after dark. What he stole I do not certainly know, for his papers are only explicit about two knives, whereof one, ivory-hilted and chased, is still in his family. He liked the knife as a weapon. But we should be wronging him to suppose that when he played the burglar he failed to find any money. The days he spent lurking in the Catacombs, where he was only disturbed by mice and a weasel. He lived well enough on the stuff in the gardens.

He did not try to learn anything of Doricot or the others. He kept himself well away from Winkfield. But when he went into the city at dusk his eyes and his ears were wide open. That the slaves who worked on the ships and the mole were driven into the bagnio before dark he could indeed have guessed without seeing. It was something to know that the bagnio mounted neither guard nor sentinels, but he could hardly hope to storm it by himself. Though its slaves were guarded by nothing but walls and gates and a few warders, no trick that he could think

of would give him the keys. The soldiery which garrisoned the forts and gave the galleys their fighting men seemed to live in a loose discipline. They furnished, of course, companies to march the slaves down to work, to guard them while they worked, and to march them back again. Save for that, they seemed to go where they chose and do what they chose, which was chiefly nothing. They lounged and slept anywhere and everywhere.

When he had given Winkfield some days of quiet, time to believe that the man who had escaped was of no importance, he began to lurk about the house again. That placid waiting, those thoughtful burglaries, express his character well. He never spoilt anything by haste. He never weakened in purpose by delay. It was some days more before he found his chance. Again and again Winkfield passed by daylight and with slaves behind him. There was a night at last when he came home alone. He had been drinking, to judge of his gait, something not allowed by the Koran. Dick rose at his side, struck him on the temple with a knife's hilt, and caught him as he fell stunned. He was dragged aside among the ruins; he was gagged and bound with his own turban. Dick hoisted him like a sack and carried him away to the Catacombs.

When Winkfield came to himself he was in a tomb hewn from the rock. Moonlight streaming through a small hole above suggested infinite space of gloom, and falling upon Dick's head as he sat eating a pumpkin, endowed him with an incongruous sanctity. Winkfield stirred in his bonds and, still unaware of them, did not understand why he could not move. He stared at Dick and tried to speak, and hardly understood why he only spluttered. Dick heard him and took off the gag.

"What is it?" said Winkfield feebly, and then was surprised to hear himself talking English.

"We'm making a beginning," quoth Dick cheerfully, and went on with his pumpkin.

Winkfield stammered at him.

"You—you—you are the lad who came with Doricot?"

"Ay, your mind's working," Dick encouraged him.

Winkfield seemed suddenly to feel his bonds. He writhed and cried out:

"Let me loose, you rascal!"

"Nay, but 'tis not working well," Dick complained. "Why should I tie you up if I was to let you loose now?"

"I'll have you under the bastinado," Winkfield cried. "I'll

have you on the hooks for it." Dick threw a piece of pumpkin skin at him and went on eating. "You dull lout!" Winkfield screamed with an oath. "You're cutting your own throat. You fool! All my slaves, I tell you, all the city will be seeking me."

"Well, this burrow was some old fellow's grave." Dick spoke with his mouth full. "'Twill do mighty well for yourn."

"Do you mean to kill me?" Winkfield cried. Dick went on eating. "Why, what have I done to you? I say, how will it serve you?"

"Aw," Dick chuckled, "to be sure it would be a comfort. Look 'e, my lad, if you've a mind to stay alive you'll ha' need to be mighty useful. For I'd sooner kill 'e than not. Just for the sake of it. So, now, what ha' you done with your little friend, Nick Doricot?"

Winkfield protested, calling more than once on the name of God that he had done nothing to Doricot, knew nothing of him. Dick stared at him and nodded.

"Ay, ay, you've a mind to be no use. And to be sure I like it best so."

He took out a knife and tried its edge on his thumb.

"What do you mean?" Winkfield screamed. "He is in the bagnio with the others. What is that to me? I could not help it. I could not save him. You do not understand. I am a slave myself."

"In the bagnio with the others!" Dick repeated. "He is alive, then?"

"How do I know? I dare not so much as ask. Why, he has made them suspect me. He has ruined me. He——"

"You rat!" quoth Dick, "you'd sell your soul to be sure he was dead. Look 'e, now, you put un into the bagnio. 'Tis for you to find a way to get him out. And if you do not, you shall die in this grave here."

"Get him out?" Winkfield gasped in astonishment unfeigned. "You are mad." Then he checked suddenly, and drew in his breath. "Nay, but i' faith, I will do what I can. I will petition the bashaw. I will spend my last zecchin. But I had begun upon that already, I promise you. I had been about it all day. Why, I had good hopes of Hassan, the secretary, who is much my friend." He laughed nervously. "Why, you are mighty hard on your freinds. As if it needed all this to make me work for Nick Doricot! Why, my friend, I was

desperate when I heard they had tracked him to my house and taken him there. I swore I would never rest nor spare nothing till I had him free."

At this point Dick interrupted with a hearty kick.

"I could break your neck for thinking me fool enough to believe all that. Why, I wouldn't trust 'e a moment, unless I had 'e where I could kill 'e quietly. Don't 'e think to be let go, my lad, not till Doricot's out o' prison. What you ha' to do is to tell me how I may get him out. Then off I go and do it. And if you do bungle it so that I never come back, why, you'll never get out of this grave neither."

Winkfield screamed at him. It was all folly, wildest folly. No slave ever came out of the slavery of the bagnio alive. For one man, a Christian, an Englishman, who was like a baby in that city, to think of tampering with the bagnio, which was strong as the Tower, was the maddest madness. Then he became insinuating, and urged again his affection, his devotion to Doricot, his influence with the Turks, the certainty that if he were let go the business would be swiftly done. Why, it was a cruel wrong to Doricot that his efforts should be hampered. And here Dick kicked him again.

Then he began to whine. What could he do? How could he help? It was impossible that Dick could come at Doricot or get him out. And to leave a man there to starve in a grave—in agony, too! for he was so bound that all his limbs throbbed and stung—it was cruel, cruel, cruel.

"Here you bide, and here you starve, and here you suffer, I do hope," quoth Dick, "till I have him out. So best find a way."

Then he began to sob. That was too much for Dick, who fell on him and beat him, and gagged him again. To the sound of his muffled moaning Dick fell asleep. So passed that first night in the Catacombs.

CHAPTER XII

DORICOT RECEIVES ENLIGHTENMENT

It is to be supposed that Winkfield suffered in body and mind all night through, but not so much—not so much in mind, at least—as Doricot. For Doricot had received enlightenment that day.

When first the three were brought to the bagnio they were stripped and flung into a big dark hall, where other naked men lay huddled close as pigs and in pig-sty filth. Then the alderman grumbled:

"Here's the end of another of your pretty plans. Oh, you're a clever, clever fool!"

Doricot had no answer.

But when the boatswain grunted out, "Well, now, that dear little friend of yours has done mighty well by we. 'Tis a bright fellow, to be sure. 'Tis not every man would ha' thought upon selling the folks that come to fish him out o' the water. And I do hope he had a good price for we. I'd not like to think I was sold cheap," then Doricot struck at him, was beaten off, and struck again. There came all the while from Doricot's mouth a sputter of blasphemy. It was in no wise to be supposed that Winkfield had sold them. No man who was better than a mound of flesh would so suppose. Matt Winkfield was a hearty, trusty fellow, and the best sea captain alive. He would surely stand by them manfully—unless—unless he was in trouble himself. Doricot much feared that they had brought suspicion upon him. At which the boatswain guffawed, and the fight began again.

It was only quieted by the men about them, who cursed and beat them both impartially for disturbing sleep. The dispute was resumed in the morning by the boatswain telling his tale to a neighbour with heavy insinuations against Winkfield, interrupted by corrective abuse from Doricot. But none of their neighbours, who were all Spaniards, cared the least about them or their fate or their quarrel or Winkfield. So argument languished.

For some days they lay in the bagnio, fed on a pittance of tasteless green bread and stinking water. There was nothing to do but to wallow in the filth and long for the hour when the armed gaolers came with baskets and pitchers. Then, partly from hunger, in part from simple, weary hatred of each other, they would fight over the sharing. But when Doricot grumbled, his neighbours cursed him and bade him be thankful. It was better, they told him, to be there and fester and rot than work naked beneath the sun and the whips. And he would have work enough and whip enough, for it was the end of the summer, and the galleys were coming to harbour, and each must be hauled up the beach, each hull scoured.

A morning came when they were aroused with whips and pikes and driven down to the beach. There they hauled at the cables with

sobbing lungs, with pulses thudding in head and heart like blows, with back bleeding deep from the leather thongs, and the sun searing the wounds till half a dozen galleys were high upon the sand. Then they tore the flesh from their hands in scouring the long hulls clean of weed and shell.

At noon, when they were let leave their work for a meal, they fell down on the sand where they stood and lay with heaving sides, heedless of each other or of anything in the world save the moment of rest. Here and there a man would wriggle jerkily like a dog when it has run itself out; and for a while they were dumb as dogs. The fragments of the maize and beanflour bread passed from listless hand to hand. Bodies quivering with strain and burning with thirst had no hunger. But when pumpkins were tossed among them there was something of a struggle. By the oaths about him Doricot knew that he had fallen among Englishmen, and said so.

"English be you?" quoth one. "How then? The heathen ha' brought in no English ship this many months. And you be new. How did they catch you?"

"Ask Captain Matt Winkfield," said the boatswain, with a grimace at Doricot.

On the word there was a stir of interest about them and blasphemy.

"What! Master Matt's done some more business, has he?" one said. "Come, let's hear."

Doricot's face was white behind the sweat.

"Do you know Matt Winkfield, then?"

"Od rot his soul! We was in his ship."

"Let's hear, my bully," the boatswain cried. "Story for story. 'Tis you to begin. You come here first."

"Story, d'ye say?" a swarthy fellow growled. "There's no story, you fool. We was in his ship off Candia, when four galleys come down upon us. 'Twas a southerly wind, and we on a lee shore. To be sure, there was naught to be done; but Master Winkfield he never tried for to do it. He had his white flag up almost afore they was aboard. And the next thing we knows is us in the chains heaving at the oars of they galleys while Master Winkfield's up on her poop hobnobbing with the heathen as fine as a peacock. How did he do it, says you? We made that out when we saw the galleys was making nor'-west. For our consort, the *Providence*, that had gone to Chio after red Malmsey, was to join with us to westward. So the galleys had her too, as

here's Johnny Entwistle and Roger Back, that was in her, to tell, saving that she made a stout fight for it. For she had old Gilbert Hale to her master, and no filthy renegado. Now here we be living the life of them that's in hell, while Matt Winkfield has his palace and his harem like a bashaw. Od rot his soul!"

The boatswain nudged Doricot. "Here's your friend that we come a-saving!"

"D'ye tell me he sold his consort?" said Doricot dully.

The swarthy man cursed him for a fool, and Winkfield by many other names. "I tell ye he sold his soul for to save his stinking body. How did he do it? He would not fight his ship, he made himself a filthy Mussulman, he showed them how to catch his consort. He's great among the heathen now by what he knows o' Christian ships, and where to watch for them. God send him swift to his account!"

Doricot said nothing. Even his friendship could not doubt the tale. He drew himself together and sat pale and breathing hard.

With a passionate cry the alderman struck at him.

"That's the man that you brought us here for."

Doricot did not strike back. There was a great roar of laughter, and, "You come out o' England for Matt Winkfield's sake!" more laughter and more. Doricot sat silent, and in the heat he shivered a little.

Then the whistles sounded and they were lashed to their work again. But from that hour Doricot was the butt of all the slaves.

It may be some satisfaction to remember that when the next morning dawned there was a man making Matt Winkfield his butt, a man without mercy for what he hated. In the tomb where Dick Rymingtowne had his prisoner the morning brought little more light than the moon. Dick woke late, stretched himself, remembered the situation with a chuckle, and turned round to look at Winkfield. Winkfield was asleep, breathing stertorously. Dick shook him, and he gave what would have been a yell but for the gag. Dick plucked the gag off and he began to cry. Dick had been cruel to shake him so; he had pains shooting through all his limbs; it would kill him to be kept bound.

"It hurts me so, it hurts me so!"

Dick laughed and bade him cry louder.

For a while he did, and then the screams and sobs shrank into a whimper, as a child's rage shrinks, and he pled pitifully again.

"I'll let you loose when I get Doricot loose, my lad. Ha' you

found a way? No? To be sure, I begin to think the grave is yourn!"

He wailed again at that, till Dick thrust the gag upon him, and bade him think if he wanted to stay alive.

"You find me a way to come at Doricot by to-night, my lad, or I'll make an end of you, for you'll be no use to me."

Therewith Dick turned and hauled himself out of the tomb. He did not think that any of Winkfield's friends, however much they might miss him, would be looking for him among the Catacombs. But it was as well to make sure.

He did make sure and saw none. When he came back Winkfield writhed at him and spluttered. "Oh, you ha' been thinking, ha' you?" said Dick, and pulled out the gag. But Winkfield only begged for water. Dick thrust pumpkin pulp into his mouth. "Maybe that's the last you'll taste, my lad."

But when Winkfield had gulped it down he began to speak to some purpose. There was a man, a Spaniard, Valdez by name, who had been taken from the bagnio to serve the treasurer, Ibrahim, and though still a slave was permitted to keep a victualling house. Thereto resorted others in like case, slaves in the service of private masters, allowed some liberty. Winkfield believed that this Valdez, for all his prosperity, was ill affected to the Turks. If any could help Dick to break the bagnio it was certainly he.

Dick whistled. It might very well be a trap. "Look 'e, my lad, I've a mind to your Valdez. But if I never come back, you'll lie here and rot. Will I go?"

Winkfield hesitated. "God help me, what else can I say?" he cried, and began to sob again. Dick looked at him critically and gagged him again, and suddenly inspired by another idea, searched him and found a good deal of money. With that he went off.

He was wary in approaching the city, and came to it from the east, but, once in, he went boldly. None could know him but Winkfield. As he came to the western harbour he stopped suddenly. On the beach a long line of galleys lay careened. One only was afloat, and that one lay by the mole, close to the bagnio. At last it seemed that he had fortune on his side.

The victualling house of Valdez was close by. Dick went in and found some three or four men whose race he could not guess, save that they were European, sitting sullenly over wine. He asked for a flagon in English, and they stared at him, surprised, suspicious, not understanding.

Then one spoke: "What's an English tongue to do here, brother?"

"I'm asking you," said Dick, and put his order into the *patois* he had learnt from Doricot.

"We want no strangers here," quoth Valdez.

He was a short man, and even in the loose eastern dress which he wore like all the rest he looked slim. But his movements had a catlike ease and something of a cat's intense energy. "No room for strangers here, Christian."

"'Tis so jolly a life that you have to yourselves," Dick put down a gold piece. "You'd have one know how merry you be. Would you, my bullies?" he laughed grimly. "Well, drink with me, God help you." Slowly, watching him with ill-will, Valdez put mugs on the table. Dick looked the company over. They had all left youth behind. All bore the scars of hard fighting and harder endurance. Yet it was plain that they had not surrendered. There was strength in them still, and a silent, sullen courage. They were still combatant of soul. Matt Winkfield's cunning or Matt Winkfield's timid malice had taught him to judge them right. Dick poured the wine and lifted his mug and took his life in his hand. "What's your will? Hell to Mahound?"

There was a stir and a rustle among them. "You put on a bold brag, my lad," one said.

"Or may be you are a damned villain," quoth Valdez.

"Why, then, will you hale me to the bashaw?" Dick grinned.

"What do you want of us?" Valdez cried.

"Is there any man here hath a mind to a Christian country?" Dick filled the mugs again. "Here's to seafaring, my bullies!"

"How o' God's name came you here?" the Englishman cried in English.

"Would you hear a fond tale?" Dick laughed, and he told them of Doricot's wild venture, of the voyage in the open boat and Winkfield's treachery, and as he told, they broke out in oaths against the folly of Doricot and the meanness of the traitor. But they took fire, they grew restless, they began to argue together of what might have been, of what should have been, of what might be yet. When at last he came to the capture of Winkfield and his slow torture in the Catacombs, they were eager, ebullient, ferocious. "So at last he found his tongue. And to you he sent me for men who would bid the devil go hang, for men like me and my captain, who'll dare the forts of hell. Now, my bullies, was the knave right? Have you heart in you yet? Will you back me?"

Will you see Christendom again? Or are ye Winkfield's kidney? Or is it away with me to the bashaw and lie quiet?"

"What do you want of us?" said Valdez again.

"To break the bagnio," Dick said, and hurried on before stupefaction sank in. "Those men o' mine inside will gnaw it down with their teeth but they'll be out. There's a man here," he grinned, "that has a use for any who be tired o' slaving to the heathen."

Valdez cried out to the Mother of God that he was mad.

Dick became cold and practical. Not for nothing had he prowled the city through night after night. It was swiftly apparent that he knew Alexandria better than they who had long been its slaves.

"Look 'e now," said he; "there's no guard at the bagnio o' nights. There's naught by a handful o' warders and bolts and bars to keep the slaves in."

"Ay, naught but that and the forts, which are full of soldiers," Valdez sneered.

"Are they so?" Dick took him up quickly. "I would ha' said they pretty soldiers was anywhere but in the forts. All over the city they be at their private pleasures. It would take you an hour to muster a hundred. Well?"

"Well, tell me something that we need telling," quoth Valdez.

"Then I tell you you be fools to be here. Why, you ha' only to cut down a gaoler or so, and you have the keys—you have the slaves out. And then—why, then, there is but one galley afloat, and all the others high and dry."

"'Tis always so in the autumn," said the Englishman dully. "I ha' seen it this ten year. They do always leave one afloat when they careen the fleet—for their letters and such like. The *Captain of Alexandria* they do call her."

"You ha' seen it this ten year, God help you!" Dick said. "And never seen how to use it! *Captain of Alexandria*, God bless her! Why, my lad, get the slaves aboard that galley, and we'll be safe in a Christian land in a week. There's none to follow us with all the other craft high and dry. Ha' you any weapons, now?" He laid more gold on the table.

They stared at him stupefied. They were back on earth again. The very brilliance of the plan appalled their slow minds. The thought of action chained them again in the legarthy of slavery. He saw soon that there was nothing to be made of them that night. Perhaps he did not see how much power his confident energy had upon them.

When he went back to the tomb he was well enough pleased to give Winkfield a whole cucumber, to listen with something like patience while Winkfield pled pathetically to be let go, to answer genially:

"You wait awhile, my lad. We'm doing well."

Winkfield was silent a moment, and then said:

"Valdez had a mind to join with you?" Dick nodded. "I knew that fellow was a traitor," Winkfield muttered.

At that Dick gave himself to laughter.

But Winkfield had still days and nights to spend tied up in the tomb. Dick had to go often to the squalid little victualling house by the harbour before the plan was made and the men who were to work it persuaded.

CHAPTER XIII

OUT OF PRISON

It was a moonless night when, swaying at a rope's end, Matt Winkfield came above ground again. He breathed the clean air noisily, plaintively, but won no pity thereby. Dick bade him not cough like a sheep.

His legs were then loosed, but not his agonized arms, the gag was left in his mouth. Dick took a grip on his girdle and, "Now march," said he, "and if you try to break from me my knife's in your spine." But there was little fear of that. Winkfield could hardly walk. Each step fetched out a groan and he had to be driven on by the knife-point. So through lonely byways they came to the victualling house. Four men received Winkfield and thrust him in and locked the door after him.

Then they made for the bagnio. There were none on the quays to give them challenge. The forts were silent as the city. Only the beacon far off at the harbour mouth broke the dark peace of the night.

Valdez knew the keeper of the bagnio. He beat upon the gate and cried his name. When the wicket was opened and the man looked out with his lantern: "Ho, you, Ali" said Valdez glibly, "here's the Englishman, Fox, that is let out to Mahomet Beg, the master of the city, hath an order to you. Let us in by your favour. It's more cattle he wants in the morning." The keeper let the wicket swing and stepped aside. Then the company of

them rushed in, and they cut him down before he could put his horn to his lips. As he fell he gasped out, "Valdez, Valdez, you have eaten my salt!"

But Valdez hissed at him: "Leech, leech, you are fat with my blood these ten years," and stabbed him again and led on.

As they came into the great courtyard warders met them on the round and in some amazement held lanterns high, crying: "Who's there? Who are you from the city?"

"Friends all," quoth Valdez, and sprang at them.

They too were hewn down, but not so silently. There were shouts of alarm and panic. When the little company had made an end of them and came to the keeper's house, they found the rest of the warders afoot or rousing. Then came the hardest of the fight. But Dick and his company were ready, resolute, desperate, and the warders taken unawares, drowsy and half-bewildered. It was soon over.

Then Valdez sent back a man to drag the great gates apart and wedge them wide as when the slaves were marched out to their tasks. With the rest he rushed on and flung open door after door of the bagnio, shouting to the sleeping slaves in one language and another: "Out, out, the prison is broke!" and as the wild flood surged out the word was passed: "To the quay, to the galley, the *Captain of Alexandria*."

But in the midst of the seething crowd Dick stood and roared again and again, "Doricot, Nick Doricot and the *Toby's* men!" and he held a lantern high.

Through the loud darkness, through the storming press of men, they came to him at last. Doricot was laughing like a madman, and he clung about Dick and babbled. Dick held him off with an oath of surprise, and crying, "On to the gate, now!" charged through the crowd.

They were out among the first, for Dick was without mercy, and the alderman and the boatswain behind him wrought mightily. They held together and the rest of that mad army thrust each for himself. By the gate they found Valdez and his three, who sprang to Dick's shout.

"To the galley! Away with you!" quoth Dick, and with Valdez at his heels ran to the victualling house. The door was flung open. Valdez snatched a skin of wine. Dick snatched Winkfield. Together they ran amid the wave of naked men that surged down to the harbour.

Aboard the one floating galley they came. In a moment she

was freighted deep. They killed the watchman with their hands. They crowded to the oar-benches, had the great oars out, stunning one another in their haste, and rowed as they had never rowed beneath the whip. Valdez and his men held the poop. Dick raged among the oarsmen.

Lights were waking in the forts. A gun thundered out, and another, but already the galley was beyond the mole. As she rose to the swell of the open sea lights came down to the beach; they heard shouts of command, and the groan of hulls upon the sand. The Turks were for launching their galleys. But all their galleys were dismantled, their slaves were fled. When dawn broke over the dark sea the galley of the slaves was alone.

It was then that the oarsmen dared a spell of respite. Then they set the great lateen sails and steered west of north. It was then that Dick hauled out of the den beneath the oar-deck Matt Winkfield, and cut his bonds, and drove him into the cabin where Doricot sat. But as they passed the benches came a yell of rage, and men of Winkfield's ship rushed after them.

Winkfield heard and saw, and fled before them screaming. So into the cabin he came with naked men after him, wild as hounds, and he flung himself upon Doricot, who sat huddled on the divan clutching Dick's doublet about his lean nakedness, and stared like a man in a trance. Winkfield could not speak anything to be understood. He twitched and slobbered wordless cries.

The alderman and Valdez and the rest of the cabin company jeered at him. With a pike snatched from the wall, Dick hardly kept back the men of his crew.

"Let be, let be! Here's the man to give him his quittance. Let be, I say!"

But they roared out threats of torture.

Doricot raised himself and seemed to wake, and put the man from him.

"Why, that's Matt Winkfield, which I came for all the way from Bristol town. You sold me to be a slave, Matt Winkfield. I thought I was your friend. How many Christian men ha' you sold to the heathen?"

There was no anger in his voice.

Winkfield cowered down and sobbed out words of no meaning.

"Give him a sword," Doricot said. He held out his hand to Valdez. Gaping, Valdez drew the scimitar from his side. Doricot thrust the hilt into Winkfield's hand, who stared at it, and then

stared up at Doricot with the face of an imbecile. "Give me a sword," Doricot said, and the boatswain took one from the cabin wall. Then Doricot drew back a pace, and suddenly, in his fierce voice of captaincy—it was the last time Dick heard it—he cried out, "Stand up and fight Matt."

Winkfield rose unsteadily, looking all the while with that horrible mindless stare at Doricot. Doricot struck at his sword and it shook. Doricot gave a whirling blow past his eyes. Then he staggered towards Doricot, and Doricot stepped aside and cut down at him where the throat joins the shoulder. He fell down and was covered in his blood.

"It is finished," said Doricot, and sat down and huddled himself together.

That was the manner of the saving of Matt Winkfield. And on the third day out from Alexandria Doricot died.

CHAPTER XIV

THE RETREAT

THE first land they saw was Crete. Before that they were "in trial and misery" for lack of victuals. Yet it seems that they stood heartily by each other, the strong yielding rations to the weak, no man making mischief or schism. This Richard Rymingtowne, who had perhaps a low estimate of human nature, records with odd, surprised enthusiasm. Plainly it seemed strange to him that men who had been delivered from an evil plight only to find new woes should not repine and rebel. But the much mixed crew—there were men of every Christian race among them—made the best of their ship and of everything and came safely to Gallipoli.

There the prior of the monastery and his monks welcomed them with zeal as heroes of the cause of the Cross, which perhaps they were, and they were "well refreshed and eased." After that, they found themselves in huge spirits, and romantic plans seemed natural. A great party of them talked of arming the galley and spending their lives in her fighting the Turk. For this, they urged, was but to fulfil a Christian duty wherein they foresaw great comfort. For they could avenge on the bodies of Turkish slaves what they had suffered. But others were anxious for home and kin if any yet remained to them, or for rest in a Christian

land. It seems that Dick Rymingtowne inclined to the romantic party. At least he writes of their enthusiasm with a geniality rare in his austere narrative, and he dismisses them with what is rarer, something like a sneer at himself. "It hath ever been my temper to believe in the grave fellows and die in my bed."

I suppose that he found that there were not enough of the romantics for a prosperous venture, or that he would not be as great a man among them as he thought necessary, or perhaps on reflection he did not like the look of them. At least you have it that his voice was for the compromise which took the galley to Malta.

Since some wanted to fight the Turk and some to get home again, Malta was obviously the golden mean. There the romantics could take service under the Knights of St. John, thence the rest could easily find passage to their own countries, there the galley could be sold at a good price and all put something in their pockets. So it was done, and from Malta Dick Rymingtowne and the boatswain and the alderman took ship for Genoa.

The two elders were in a hurry to see England again, and there seems to have been some quarrelling. At least, I suppose they made the quarrel, and Dick grinned. For they could do little without him. With his knack of learning any trick that was useful, he had picked up from Doricot enough of one language or another to hold his own in any Christian port of the Mediterranean. Beyond English, the elders knew little but an oath or two. There was no English ship homeward bound in Genoa, and they had to wait for what Dick Rymingtowne chose to contrive. He was in no hurry.

I must believe that he had desire enough to look at Mary Rymingtowne again. But a home-coming then could not be the home-coming of his ambitions. You are not to suppose that he had snatched nothing out of Alexandria. He is very reticent about the business, but I infer that he had acquired by those nocturnal exploits a bosom full of little Eastern things, odd or rare, and he found a good market for them in Genoa. At least, he talks of traffics there, and what can he have had to traffic in but such matters as came from those Alexandrian burglaries and were borne on his person? But however much he made out of them, he had certainly not enough to bring him back in the triumph he intended. It is plain that thus far he considered himself a failure. You may guess that he was in no temper to go any man's way but his own.

So he kept them waiting till he had made an end of his "traffics," and I doubt if they had any of the profits. When they started homeward it was, against their will, overland and on charity. In his chaffering with jewellers, Dick came upon a young gentleman of Somerset. Roger Melcombe, who was, according to the fashion, adorning himself with all the graces of Italy. To Mr. Melcombe Dick told the tale of three West Country men, the only begetters of the great deed at Alexandria, triumphant champions of Christendom, now penniless, seeking painfully their own land again. Mr. Melcombe made them of his party, and at his luxurious leisure marched them across France.

Of course they could have found a ship. Why Dick chose the slow march of a gentleman studying the world I cannot tell. I do not suspect him of any passion for seeing cities and men. He may have intended some more small "traffics" in Milan or Paris. He may have thought that something of profit might meet him on the way. Perhaps it is most likely that as it was not then so sure how long the new Queen Elizabeth would sit upon her throne, how soon the half French Mary of Scots would oust her, or what ventures from France might trouble the English peace, he thought it worth a practical man's while to find out what these French folks were like.

Whatever he had in his head, across France he went with his shipmates, and it was many a month before they saw the English shore. On Southampton quay he parted from Mr. Melcombe, who pronounced him the usefulest fellow that ever a man knew and gave him twenty pounds. All which generosity Dick took with a grin, and lent the alderman five pounds of it to buy him breeches and a passage for Bristol. The poor man was now rampant for his business. The boatswain concluded to stand by Dick, in which choice he was not encouraged. It does not appear that he ever repented.

CHAPTER XV

GOLD VELVET

SHE came from a copse of silver-birch and daffodils. A west wind was blowing through the sunshine, and the great shoulders of the downs stood grey beneath cloud shadows. To northward

the valley was dim behind the gauze of a swift shower. About her it shone and sparkled and glowed. There was light in the foam of the spring flood that surged down the brook, and even the turbid white depths flashed and gleamed. The meadow grass was lustrous, and the million flowers among it flamed bright as jewels. The trees bore their leaf-buds still, all rosy and gold and sea-spray green. A blackbird in a riotous willow mocked her as she came.

Mary Rymingtowne in this springtime felt herself very much a woman. She was tall enough for any woman, to be sure, and of a gait as royal as the most womanly woman's. Even in her cloak she was slight. Its hood shadowed the grave, virginal charm of her face, kept the shimmering brown hair all but secret. She wore nothing to give colour to her clear pallor. She was all silvery grey, save for a band of gold about the slim ankles. But from the hood her eyes shone and her lips were dark.

She came upon a man who was only her father. She checked suddenly, and then recovered herself with imposing dignity. She looked at him as though she would ask how he dared exist. He laughed gently and made her a bow:

"I ask pardon, madam."

"I do not know what you mean."

"I see that I ought not to be here. But, by your leave, I could not tell that you would be here to resent it. For you said you would stay with your books."

"I came to the end."

Mr. Rymingtowne opened his eyes wide.

"Now, God ha' mercy! I thought you were only at the beginning."

It is to be supposed that inside the hood she was blushing, for she turned half away, and she cried out with some petulance:

"I cannot tell what you mean."

Again Mr. Rymingtowne laughed.

"Then, indeed, I'll not tell you. Prithee, may I walk with you? For I never saw a prettier child."

"You will always talk to me like a child."

"My dear, the day will come when you'll be glad enough of that. But, indeed, you are too much a child yet." He looked at her with a whimsical smile, but she would not look at him.

"Well! I am old enough to know when I am in the way, Mary. And yet—I came to remind you that I am in the way." With which he touched his hat to her and passed on.

She did not wait, she did not look after him, she went the other way hastily. By the brookside awhile, and then, where it wandered curling across the meadows, away through a thicket of hazel and up towards the downs she went, and up still by a hollow path where there was a gleam of primroses and the scent of violets. At first, though the hill rose steep against her, she was light of foot, but farther on, where the slope grew easier, she began to labour and look behind her and all about. Then she stopped, and, faltering, went back a little, and turned again and came very slowly to a level place scooped in the side of the down as though men had worked there in old years. It was all green, and in among the short, close turf flowers sparkled. It was almost as sheltered as a cave, for the path curved sharply into it above and below, and only from the steep, bare brow of the overhanging down was there a chance to spy out who chose to linger there. She found no one.

She hesitated, walked a little this way and that petulantly, then turned, and climbing the bank of the hollow path, stood looking out over the vale, fronting the wind that bore back her cloak against her.

A man came riding. As she turned he saw her there in the wind, and cried out:

"Artemis! Artemis that roams the mountains!" and bowed beautifully.

Mary Rymington came down from the bank.

"I do not know who this Artemis is, my lord," she said.

"She was a maiden goddess, most beautiful, and you are she," said my lord, and dismounted with too much grace. He was fine in a cloak of pale gold velvet, with all the rest of him to match. He stood as tall as she, and nearly as slight. He seemed to desire the fantastic even in the twirl of his little black beard. But there was plainly vigour enough in him and fire. It appears from other sources that my Lord Branscombe was one of the most decorated of the Italianate Englishmen who frightened his age.

"I do not want to be a goddess. I want to be alive—I want to be real."

"Then have you your desire, i' faith. For you have more life in you than the spring wind itself or its wild kissing rain. That is why all the world comes wooing you."

"Oh, I cry you mercy!" she laughed. "If I were so beset I had best go hang myself for the sake of peace. But I thank you,

my lord," she made him a little curtsey, "there is none who so troubles me." But her voice was not quite calm.

"Am I so cursed?" my lord cried. "Can I not even trouble you? That heart which abides in the beatitude of you, has it not yielded to beat one throb the quicker for me? Why then, out upon my loutish body, my Bæotian wit, that cannot show you what is in my soul! For I swear by Dan Orpheus, which was the greatest of all lovers, since the unhappiest he was, the soul of me is agonizing for love of the joy of your life."

"Sure, 'tis out of an Italian poetry book?" she suggested demurely.

"Ah, madame, I know you must mock me! It's the royal right, it's the most bewildering charm of you. That life that's more than man's life in you must ever make a mockery of the antics of men who pray and worship and love if by any means they may win something of your spirit. You must ever be cruel, in virtue of your wonder of womanhood. What am I, who long and yearn, but an awkward, gambolling fool to your sure surge of strength?" His voice rang well.

"You call me strange names," she said, and her bosom heaved. "Nay, my lord, it is not so indeed. I am not strong at all. I cannot tell why you talk so of the life in me. I am all weak—and little. I—I do not know"—her lip trembled and she looked at him with wide eyes, very wistful. "It is you, it is you who mock, I think," she said slowly. "You make me feel like a child when grown folks laugh at it. You talk as I cannot understand—things I have not known, I have not felt. And I—I do not know. I am not sure. You are so much more than I am."

"Infinitely little, infinitely humble before you!" he cried. He moved the reins on his arm and flung back his cloak and struck a gallant figure. "Yet with your spirit calling me to achievement I will be something in the world's eye. I cry an answer to your challenge. I will make myself a power in England—ay, and beyond her seas. I swear it by the light in your eyes." He caught her hand, but she turned away. "Look at me! Look at me! Why, you are not afraid?" There was exultation not the least fantastic in his voice.

But she turned and met his eyes full and fair.

"I am not afraid," she said, and her face was quite calm, but wistful still.

On a sudden his horse plunged violently, and a little chalk flint came bounding at her skirts. She started aside and looked

all about her. It seemed as if some one had thrown at them. There was no one in sight. My lord did not look for any one. He had not seen the stone. He was muttering imprecations on horseflies as the horse and he danced together. And she said nothing, from which you may infer what you will.

When he came to her again:

"Nay, Mary, it is I who am afraid," he whispered, "afraid before the beauty of your soul, for I can never give it worthy service. Yet more, my heart and my queen, yet more than any man I am born to know you and serve. You call to me for all that I am, and I——"

He was drawing her to him, but she cried out, "Not now, not now," so passionately that he let her go. She did not shrink from him, but still meeting his eyes, "I do not know," she said.

A long time he stood looking at her in silence, then fell on one knee and kissed her hand.

"It's a thousand years till to-morrow," he said.

"To-morrow," she said in a strange, thoughtful tone. He kissed her hand again, and sprang on his horse, and with an excellent bow dashed romantically away.

Mary Rymingtowne went down the hill very slowly. It is to be supposed that she saw little but thoughts and dreams as she went. For after a little way she found herself on a sudden face to face, breast to breast, with a man. She caught her breath. He might have risen out of the ground for all she knew of his coming. She drew back a little haughtily and erect, and stared disdain at him. He did not move out of her way.

He was a hulking fellow, heavily built, long-limbed, loose-limbed. His threadbare faded doublet seemed too small for him. He had a great hole in one stocking. There was much rust on the dented scabbard of the short sword at his side. His big, lean face, all brow and chin and jaw, was hungrily fierce. He looked altogether one of the discarded serving-men or one of the broken-down gentry, turned swashbucklers, thieves, assassins, of whom England knew many in those years. You recognize Diccon, the shepherd, who went seafaring and called himself Richard Rymingtowne.

"You'll ha' forgot who I am," he drawled, and she saw the deep-set grey eyes gleam. "I ha' come to make ye remember!"

"Ah!" There was something more than the surprise of sudden memory in the cry. Then she laughed a little. "I know you, Diccon. But you are so burnt! And I am sure you are much

bigger. Oh, but of course, I know you!" She held out her hand, smiling.

He clutched at it and gripped it.

"Maybe I am bigger," he drawled. "'Tis for you to find out what I be. You ha' forgot, mistress."

Her hand, her arm, quivered in his grip, and she gave a cry of pain. But she did not speak, she did not try to free herself, and as she looked at him, strangely intent, her lips parted, and she blushed dark. "You said you would come back," she breathed, as if she spoke to herself.

"I went to sea to make my fortune. I ha' not made it. But I come back."

"Oh, I am sorry!"

"Sorry that I be back?"

"No, no. Sorry you—you have not been fortunate."

"I come back wi' naught," he said heavily. "There's a brave fellow for ye now! What'll you say to him, mistress? To be sure you should talk haughtily to such."

"I? Oh, do you think I care if you are not rich?" Her face was alive and eager with tenderness. She was suddenly at ease now that he confessed failure, and seemed to ask comfort. "I—we should not like you any better if you had made all the fortune in the world. It's you yourself which matters to us. How could you think we have forgotten?" As she offered comfort she grew more and more kind. "Ah, but it's you yourself that we—we—welcome. And I am glad indeed you have come. I don't care about fortune or not. How could you think that?" Her eyes were shining.

He gave a short, hard laugh.

"Eh, but you'll have to care, mistress," he drawled, and again she was quivering at his grip. She did not cry out, but she grew pale now; she began to draw away. "Well, I ha' come back. And here I have to throw a stone at your fine gentleman!"

"You! It was you!" She tried to wrench her hand out of his, but only to make herself jerk awkwardly. She blushed. Then with a parade of contempt: "I am sorry that I did not see you, sir."

"Nay, you was too busy. But I was there or thereabout. I was watching you," he drawled with some humour in his voice, but none in his eyes.

She drew herself up. Her blush was no more than a touch of anger in either cheek.

"Be pleased to let me go, sir," she said. "You do yourself wrong to behave so basely."

"Not I, God bless you!" said he. He did not let go her hand, but looked down at it grimly. "Ay, he kissed it, didn't he? A pretty gentleman, surely. And I ha' never done that. But you'm not for him, my lass." Suddenly he flung her hand away and took her by the shoulders, shaking her a little. "So you'll let him have no more of you. 'Tis not good for you to have him handling you. You'm for something bigger than the fine my lord knows about." It is likely that she felt frail in his grasp. She put her hands on his arms and tried feebly to thrust him away. But anger had fled from her face and she was pale again. "You ha' forgot. You'm for me."

He let her go, pushing her a little back. After a moment she broke out into wild laughter.

"Oh, I ought to be angry! Ah, but, Diccon, I am sorry! You—you——"

"Ay, you'm angry, and you'm sorry, and you'm laughing. For I be all mighty foolish surely. For I was born a poor shepherd, and no more than a poor sailorman I be. Well, you would not ha' seen me now but that I heard to Devizes my lord was after you. I was but coming to have a sly look at ye and go away again. Now I'll ha' done with him before I leave you. For, poor sailorman and all that I be, you'm for me." He waited a moment, frowning at her, then turned on his heel and was gone.

Mary Rymingtowne, following very slowly, had some excuse for agitation, and would not have confessed to it. For some time she had inclined to believe herself in love with my Lord Branscombe. He sought her so often that it had become natural to think of him as part of her life. He was always so decorative, so urgent, that it was impossible to think of him as anything but a lover. She admitted to herself with tremors that his wooing affected her. He was so fine a fellow. He was so exciting.

It made him more exciting that her father should not like him. For the worst thing about him was his obvious desirability—wealth and birth and title. All that robbed him of charm, urged her to avoid him. But if he were forbidden, there was at once romance in him. If there was something considerable against him, he was fascinating.

She would have gone home with nothing but the most delicious thrills, if there had not been the intrusion of the preposterous Diccon. Not that she had ever forgotten him. He was too

strange a creature. The dull, loutish lad who had suddenly discovered himself alert and infinitely cunning, and saved her father from a murderous trap; the boor who had plagued her childhood by following her and spying on her, and who, in the moment when he was recognized a rare fellow, had left her in a hurry, swearing to come back; the wonders of Diccon the shepherd had never been long out of her mind. The heavy, lumbering form, the heavy lumbering speech, the dull, bulky face, the gleam of the deep-set eyes—all the outside of the man had somehow imposed itself upon her as significant, intimately important. Which was too absurd, for the creature was only a shepherd lad, ignorant, uncouth, a son of the earth, and she was Mary Rymingtonne of Assynton. He had haunted her, he was part of her life, and, in some strange fashion, corporeally—always corporeally. The form and substance of him were always at hand. But in thought or dream or phantasm he had never dared to boast as he boasted that day. To throw stones at my Lord Branscombe's adoration! To profess himself penniless, a failure, a common seaman, as the preface to a vaunt that she belonged to him. The greatest man in the world had no right to talk so, and he—oh, he was impudence run mad! And yet, and yet she owned, despising herself for having to own it, that he made her afraid. Certainly he was preposterous, he was mad; but the titillating thrills that should have come from my lord's ardour were quenched in a vague, harrassing dread.

CHAPTER XVI

MY LORD'S PLOT

It will not much surprise you to hear that before my Lord Branscombe arrived at the pleasant trysting-place on the morrow he met Dick. He was riding from his house at Whitchurch by the old track across the downs. His horse was suddenly aware of a white thing that fluttered and flapped and rustled. His horse resented it with proper spirit, shied violently, and but that my Lord Branscombe had skill and resource in the saddle, would have taken them both a somersault down the steep grassy slope. On the verge of the track my lord held him and turned to see the large clumsy shape of Dick rising at leisure, while a scarf was being tucked into his bosom.

"I see you was not thinking of seeing me," Dick drawled.

My lord, invoking the devil, asked who he was, and why (the devil again being called in aid) he was waving his shirt.

"My shirt?" Dick drawled gravely. "You ha' not seen my shirt. You be thankful. 'Twas an Egyptian scarf that frightened you." His brow came down. "As for who I be, 'tis no such matter, seeing you be my Lord Branscombe."

"What! You've an errand to me?" My lord's tone changed to eagerness, and he plied spur to urge his horse towards Dick, who was plainly distasteful to the animal.

Dick considered my lord solemnly. It was obvious that he expected a messenger; he supposed Dick to be the messenger, and was excited. It would, therefore, be worth while for one who in a general way, desired the overthrow of my lord, to find out what sort of message he wanted, what was the business that excited him. And Dick was always admirable—it is still characteristic of his family—in making the most of every chance that offered. Better at that than at seeing his way far ahead. So he considered my lord solemnly, and solemnly nodded.

"Ay, I've an errand to 'e," said he.

"Whence do you come, my lad?"

Again Dick considered him, and conceiving that it would be best to be mysterious, replied with his new accomplishments, a French gesture and the French language.

"*Quoi! Monsieur ne comprend pas?*"

At once he saw that he had done very well. My lord was still more excited, and cried out:

"You come from France?" Since he seemed to like the idea so much, Dick nodded sagely. "From Paris?"

Dick laughed. He began to guess his way. You remember what year this was. Queen Elizabeth had not been long upon the throne, was not very firm in her seat, and there were many enemies of her and her religion, of her father and particularly of her mother, plotting to pluck her down. Mary of Scots, who was Queen of France, called herself Queen of England, and it was common talk in Paris—Mr. Melcombe had nearly been in a duel about the business—that many Englishmen were ready to fight to make her so.

"So you be one of them, my lord," quoth Dick to himself, and aloud he said, "Ay, monsieur, from Paris." When he put himself in the way he had meant no more than to find out what manner of man my lord was; perhaps, if it seemed useful, to

pick a quarrel. But now, if he were daintily handled, my lord was going to confess himself a traitor, my lord was going to deliver himself to destruction.

"And what do they say in Paris?" Branscombe cried eagerly.

Dick watched my lord from half-shut eyes. What Paris was saying in the way of scandal and brag against the Queen of England he knew well enough. But he did not see how to snare Branscombe in that. He wanted more information about the man. He wanted to know how far my lord had gone and who were his friends. So he felt his way slowly. "Why, in Paris they do say as some of you says too much. Some o' you in England ha' been talking more than ye ought. Whereby Queen Bess and her fellows do know more than they need."

That had the designed effect of making my lord angry. "God's body, is this your errand to me, sirrah?" he cried with rising colour. "D'ye tell me that I have been blabbing? Who bade you?" He paused for a reply and got none. "Who sent you, I say?"

"Why, who would you think now?" Dick laughed.

My lord execrated his impudence.

"Now, God ha' mercy, 'tis not mine neither. They'm mighty more impudent to you in the Hôtel de Guise." He named at a venture the headquarters of the cause of Mary of Scots.

"It is D'Elbœuf, then!" my lord cried.

Dick chuckled: "You should ha' seen his veins swell when he talked of you."

My lord swore.

"Go back and see his veins swell when you tell him I say he is a fat fool."

"Nay, nay, you'm too hot." Dick talked to him like a father. "'Tis not thought that you ha' done worse than young man's folly. But we do know things is known about your part. And there's a cunning old fellow hereby—Ribbletowne, is it? Rymingtonne, maybe; he's very stubborn for Queen Bess. And you do go consorting after a pretty lass which is his daughter. So M. D'Elbœuf would have you not do such. For no doubt she's a wily piece."

My lord, with a shout, consigned M. D'Elbœuf to hell. In a vehement flood of words said much else of him and his messenger.

"Now that's foolish," Dick remonstrated. "And it's no answer neither."

My lord assured him through many oaths that no other answer there would be.

Dick shrugged a heavy shoulder.

"Amen, and so be it, then. A wilful lad mun have his way. But ye'll give it me in a letter, so please you. I'd not charge my mouth with it."

"I'll give you a letter," my lord cried with an oath. "Get you to Barbury." And off he galloped to his trysting-place.

Dick sat down to chuckle. It amused him to imagine Mary Rymingtowne's emotions if she were ever to hear of herself as crafty traitress, a Delilah. My lord did not much amuse him. He was too apt to despise people whom he could deceive. But with himself he was happily content.

Mary Rymingtowne was late at the trysting-place for several reasons. The day before my lord had kept her waiting; maidenhood as well as pride demanded that he should have to wait for her. He was to require an answer to the question whether she loved him, and she did not know at all what to say. It is possible that as she came very late and still very slowly, she felt some faint hope that he might have gone away.

My lord, thanks to the interruption of Dick, had not been waiting long, but he displayed a great impatience. He sprang from his horse almost into her arms. He captured her with one arm, though she drew back and would have freed herself.

"My lady, my queen!" he cried. "I am mad with yearning for you. I have been upon the rack. Nay, look at me. Give me my answer from your eyes."

Her face was red. She held herself away from him.

"I do not know," she said, and as she spoke turned to look him.

She meant her eyes to show no yielding. He might have seen doubt there, and a brave honesty, and the spirit of maidenhood. But my lord was one of the dangerous folk who see what they choose to see. To her horror he caught her to him and cried out :

"Ah, the wonder of you! Mine for my crown and my delight! Mine!" Then almost as suddenly he let her go, kissed her hand fiercely, and was in the saddle again, and with a shout of "Mine!" dashed away.

Even in her bewildered alarm she saw that he was riding towards Assynton, towards her home, not his, and was the more troubled.

In his upper room in the manor house at Assynton Mr. Rymingtowne sat studious over the astronomic tables of Reinhold. He was told that my Lord Branscombe had come and desired to speak with him. Mr. Rymingtowne caressed his little white beard for a while before he answered that my Lord Branscombe should be brought. The servant was just going out when he spoke again:

"Tell Mistress Mary that I cannot come to her for a little." The servant begged pardon, but Mistress Mary had gone walking and was still out. "Very well," said Mr. Rymingtowne, and seemed more than satisfied.

My Lord Branscombe appeared with impressive grace.

"I rejoice," he explained, "that I have some claim to do myself this honour—to come upon Mr. Rymingtowne when he is alone with divine philosophy."

"It must be pleasant, I think, to rejoice so easily," Mr. Rymingtowne reflected. "But for my part I am dazzled."

"Sir, I know no man, and I have known many of the greatest in Christendom, for whose calm deep of wisdom I have such esteem as yours."

"It is probably because you have never heard me say twenty words together," Mr. Rymingtowne suggested.

"You are too modest, sir," my lord cried, and Mr. Rymingtowne hid a smile with his hand. "Your mere presence proves you a man who dwells with the mystery of the empyrean. I am proud that it is you to whom I come."

"You are much more mysterious than the empyrean, my lord," said Mr. Rymingtowne.

"I am glad that you do not guess my errand. I shall be plain enough ere all is told. Mr. Rymingtowne, I need not disguise from you that the wanton malice of folly has sought to make me think ill of you."

Mr. Rymingtowne opened his eyes wide.

"If folly says that I would have you think of me at all, 'tis the silliest folly ever I met."

"Sir, it is said that you intend ill to my ambitions, my schemes, my pledged faith. But——"

"But I never knew that you had any," Mr. Rymingtowne put in blandly.

"But I curse such lies for the knavery of fools. And you will know how little I esteem them, what honour I have for you" (here Mr. Rymingtowne began to look at an astrolabe earnestly

to restrain his emotions), "when I tell you that I come seeking your daughter's hand." He struck a fine attitude. He was a well-made fellow, trained by the best masters in Italy, and magnificently caparisoned. But perhaps there was something too much condescension in his aspect.

For when Mr. Rymington began to look at him the whimsical amusement was soon gone from that lean, lined face. Mr. Rymington rose and drew his long gown about him, and spoke for the first time gravely:

"My lord, I hope that I value aright the honour which you intend to my family. But my daughter is not something that I can give. And——"

My lord laughed.

"Say no more, sir—say no more. I will stand surety for your daughter's good will. Come, let us——" He approached, holding out his hand.

Mr. Rymington went on quietly as if he had said nothing that mattered:

"And if it were mine to give, I tell you frankly, my lord, it is not to you that she would be given. I could not ask of you the condescension to take her."

"You do her wrong, by Heaven!" my lord cried passionately, and then as if light suddenly broke upon him, "Why, sir—why do you mock me?"

"How could I?" said Mr. Rymington sadly.

"What is your answer, then?"

"With my good-will she is not for you, my lord. I doubt not I can rely on you to discover that you are not for her."

"Why, this is insolence!" my lord cried. "It is true, then, what he said! You are my enemy!"

"I protest, in this an excellent good friend to you. As to myself," said Mr. Rymington placidly.

"Oh, you have your answer, have you? Be assured I shall have mine!" Out my lord flung.

If you consider that he was on horseback, that he was in an ecstasy of vanity, and perhaps of passion, compelling him to a high speed, while Mary Rymington was afoot with bewilderment and hesitation and fear, you will understand why he had come and gone before she was back at Assynton Manor. Moreover, as he went off by the straight road to Barbury instead of that bridle-track past the trysting-place and over the downs, she did not see him again that day.

Now Dick, who had, you remember, appointed to meet Branscombe at Barbury, and there obtain his letter to M. D'Elbœuf, determined that my lord would be none the worse for being kept waiting. Dick wanted to know what had happened at the trysting-place—whether Mary Rymingtowne had been told she was a Delilah, or something else.

So, as Mary came up the avenue of beeches, loitering here and there to pick a primrose, or not to pick one, because she was afraid of what she might find at home, she heard a dragging step behind her, and turned to see Dick grin.

"And how does my lord find himself to-day?" he asked politely.

Mary's cheeks burnt. She took a step forward. For a moment he thought she was going to strike him. Her eyes flashed.

"You make yourself contemptible when you talk like that," she cried.

He grinned more broadly.

"And if I like to, 'tis what I like, and there's an end."

"You do not like to. You are just a boy being rude and bragging," she panted.

His brow lifted. It was plain that her authority had surprised him. She saw it, and was quick to take advantage.

"There, let us have no more of that, Diccon! Are you coming to the manor?"

"Well, now, I'd not ha' said you was in such a hurry to get there," he drawled. "But if you can tell me for sure I'll not find my lord there, I'm willing."

She grew pale.

"You are impudent," she stammered.

"Eh, you'm expecting him there likely." His sunken eyes grew keen.

She swept away from him, and on he lumbered after. He did not feel at all sure, it appears, what my lord had said to her.

They found Mr. Rymingtowne walking on the terrace. He came towards them quickly.

"Why"—he recognized Dick with surprise—"why Mary, I find you in good company. Diccon, lad, I am something more than glad to see you home again."

Dick took his hand.

"And I'm noways glad to see you," he drawled. "I went away for to make my fortune, and here I come back wi' naught."

"Is that worth being sorry for?" said Mr. Rymingtowne.

"Who said I was sorry?" quoth Dick fiercely. "Time enough to be sorry when I'm beat. I do want a word with you." He paused. "If mistress here can spare you. And so be you're not busy with my lord." In diverse ways the faces of father and daughter expressed surprise. "My Lord Branscombe," Dick explained. "I heard tell as he was here."

With different emphasis the faces of father and daughter seemed to say that he was an uncanny creature.

"Prithee, Diccon, what do you know of my Lord Branscombe?" Mr. Rymingtowne smiled.

"Naught more than's common talk. 'Tis an Italianate fellow, surely." He quoted the Italian proverb that an Englishman Italianate is a devil incarnate, and the two stared to hear him speak Italian. "'Tis known he hath a double life." A roving eye sought Mary. "I'd not mean he keeps a wife stowed away, but—but there, you do know him surely."

"We know that my Lord Branscombe is far above slander," Mary cried.

"He'll ha' told you so himself, to be sure," Dick drawled. "But, by your leave, may I have a word with you?" He turned to Mr. Rymingtowne, who, with great respect—partly, perhaps, sincere—ushered him in.

Then Mr. Rymingtowne was again surprised, for Dick pulled out a leather bag, said that it held five hundred pounds, and desired Mr. Rymingtowne to buy for him therewith any land for sale within ten miles of Assynton. For he was soon off to sea again and could not stay.

"But you said that you came back with naught, my lad?" Mr. Rymingtowne protested feebly.

"What be that?" Dick snapped his big fingers. "I do want a fortune."

"Here's the worth of a good farm." Dick leaned towards him.

"D'ye think I'll be content wi' a farm?" he said fiercely. "I want, d'ye see—I want! Oh, but you mean well, and ye'll do your best. Give ye good day."

He was gone before Mr. Rymingtowne had an answer.

Mr. Rymingtowne still felt breathless as he sought his daughter in her withdrawing-room. But, after all, his daughter was to him by far more important than the mystery of any man alive. Mary Rymingtowne betrayed anxiety. Her father sat down at his leisure.

"My Lord Branscombe has been with me, Mary." He waited for an answer, and none came. She would not look at him. "He says that he wishes to make you my lady." Still there was no look nor answer. "He says that you—are not unwilling. That is not true?"

She looked up, blushing, but quite calm.

"I do not know."

"My dear!" There was something of sadness, something of surprise in his voice. "I told him that it would never be with my good-will."

"I—was afraid," she murmured.

"I do not believe he will ever win your will."

"I—I do not know," she murmured, and then, suddenly clasping her father's hand, "Oh, forgive me, forgive me!" He bowed over the hand and kissed it. They had been sitting some while silent when suddenly a vision of Dick arose before Mr. Rymingtowne's melancholy thoughts.

He made an exclamation.

"I protest our friend Diccon is a strange creature. Why did he talk of Branscombe?" Mary Rymingtowne did not feel able to tell. She sat with her head bent, her eyes hidden. "It is not often one finds a man so much of a man as to be puzzling. But he—he bewilders."

"He is bewildering," said Mary Rymingtowne; and then, to her father's complete amazement, she began to cry.

Dick had a five-mile walk before him to Barbury, and took it leisurely, and arrived with the twilight. He announced himself as "the man that's come for the letter," was at once admitted and found my lord in a bad temper.

"You should have been here hours ago, fellow."

"Eh, I'm slow and you be quick, and that's the difference 'twixt you and me." My lord made an angry noise resenting any comparison, though it only discovered a difference. "But time enough for me to take your letter. Where is it?"

My lord could not give it him without making a large and florid speech about what was in it. With that we are happily not concerned. The letter was a great effort in the euphuistic style, containing more tropes and far-sought adjectives than you would easily believe. Its substance was that if M. D'Elbœuf said my lord Branscombe was betraying secrets he was a liar and a fool! that my lord could more easily do without M. D'Elbœuf than M. D'Elbœuf without him. That without M. D'Elbœuf

moving one fat finger my lord would engage to start such a surge of revolt in England as should carry his most noble and most glorious liege lady, Mary Stuart, Queen of France, of Scotland, of England, and of hearts, safe to the English throne.

When Dick came back to the room in the ale-house at Assynton, where he lodged, he slipped a hot knife under the seal and read the letter, that there should be no mistake how it sounded. He was well satisfied. My lord convicted himself of treason so clearly that the silliest justice of the peace would have no doubt about arresting him. Dick was rarely in a hurry. He put the letter back in his pocket. But the old boatswain who was his companion at the ale-house found him more than commonly bibulous that night.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CLEAN DAGGER

ON the next day he was as soberly sluggish as ever. The boatswain complained with some bitterness of his pestilent eternal habit of loafing and gaping about the downs. Dick was, of course, anxious to see what happened, if anything were to happen, at the trysting-place. He lay on his face for some time in vain. Mary Rymingtowne did not come at the familiar hour, nor my lord either. But after a while Dick heard horses. My lord appeared, reined up, and waited as much as half an hour. Then he shouted out something, and other men came spurring up, one with a led horse that bore a woman's saddle. They passed on and out of sight. Dick went down the hill at a run.

It was always Mary Rymingtowne's habit to walk by the brook. There each in turn, each in his own way, Dick and my lord Branscombe had learnt to covet her. Down by the brook Branscombe led his horsemen, and halted them behind a copse and went on still. He was rewarded.

Mary Rymingtowne stood alone, a slim, grey creature, with a bunch of kingcups golden in her hand; she was looking down at a swirling pool of grey water where the trout were leaping.

"Well met, well met!" my lord cried, and bent to the saddle, and snatched her hands, flowers and all.

She looked up at him with a strange glow in her eyes.

"I did not bid you come," she said.

"Not with your words, but with your soul!" he cried. "Come, my heart's mistress, come the irremediable way! I have endured my probation for an eternity in each day. I can no more. Grant me my paradise. Come, crown me! Come, sound the clarion to my spirit in the emprise that I must venture! Nay, I'll be denied no more. Maiden modesty hath had its hour. I am hungry and thirsty for you!" He snatched her in his arms and swung her up on the saddle before him. "You are mine! You are mine!" he cried, and had his horse round and was off.

"It is not—it is not—I will not——" She was breathless and struggling, but not desperate.

"My will is thy will, and thine mine!" He drove in his spurs.

She panted out, "No, no, no!" but very soon she rested quiet against him. There was a strange smile in her eyes.

His horsemen thundered after him, and so they sped on over the windy down to his house at Barbury.

To Mr. Rymingtowne's woodman, as he overlooked the fencing of a new plantation, there appeared running a fat and aged fellow, who sobbed out, "Go 'e up to squire. Tell 'e as my Lord Branscombe hath stole his daughter, and is away to Barbury wi' her," and therewith collapsed upon the ground and seemed like to burst. This was the boatswain.

I have always supposed that Dick had some particular affection for Mr. Rymingtowne. Else I do not think that he would have troubled to send him news of the affair. For that was plainly mere courtesy. Dick proposed to deal with my lord himself. A father's assistance was, therefore, merely superfluous. Dick had run back to his ale-house and taken the one cob that was all its horseflesh, and while the boatswain carried his message to the manor he was riding to Barbury.

My Lord Branscombe's house at Barbury, hardly as old as himself, was in the Italian style, formal without and magnificent within. Mary Rymingtowne, set down breathless and dishevelled in its hall, saw her disorder reflected in a hundred panels that shone like mirrors. Vases of gold and silver glittered everywhere, and gleaming white statues of a luscious style. It was yet more disconcerting that a whole regiment of servants were bowing at her, servants all silk and velvet, as fine as the finest gentleman she had ever seen.

But my lord hurried her on. Whether or not she had been willing to be captured, she was very glad now of the arm that surrounded her and bore her away from those eyes and that

alarming splendour. For my part I believe she had enjoyed the capture. I am sure that she never liked my lord so well as on this day of his violence. She was never, of course, afraid of him. She was vastly surprised to find that he could venture anything so boldly masterful. But since he could, she found him delicious. His airs and graces, his comeliness, his fantastics, his flattering rhetoric, had always been pleasant. She had always with him, even in the highest of his flights, a comfortable confidence that she was the stronger. Too much the stronger, indeed—that was the fault of him.

But if his passion for her could make him manly enough to play the master, mad enough to take her by force, surely he was the perfect lover. A man not of stature, not of force to make the woman's soul quail, yet with a strength of passion that made him challenge the world for her sake—surely he must be all that woman could desire. At least, he could keep her safe from the strange, savage, frightening creature, Diccon the shepherd. But even in this glorious excitement of body and mind the memory of Dick started up to haunt her.

My lord brought her to a room with walls of yellow wood that shone like gold, and a carpet of apple-green, into which her feet sank deep. There was furniture of austere classic shape and little statues in bronze and silver. He pressed her down into a chair and bowed and kissed her foot.

“Welcome, and a thousand times welcome to your shrine!”

She looked over her shoulder, and then turned with flaming face, calling herself silently a fool and a coward. Why should she expect to see Dick's heavy shape slouch in?

“’Tis a temple all unworthy of you, my divinity, even as this poor spirit of mine is by far too mean a house for the glory of thine. Yet of both shall you make what you will till they are fashioned anew to the need of thine own perfection. Come, my soul's desire, come; the priest waits to speak the words that proclaim thee mine.”

“Now?” she cried, and began to tremble, and laughed then.

There was a stumble of hurried steps and confused voices. The door flung open as if the latch was burst. Dick came thudding in. He pulled up short and chuckled, and stood breathing hard, looking down with grim scorn at the red-faced, dishevelled Mary and my lord's splendour kneeling at her feet.

“You ha' done it finely, you have, to be sure,” he drawled.

Branscombe sprang up and rushed at him, eloquent in two languages, and was thrust off to reel back upon Mary.

"You'll have all England calling you fool, you will," Dick grinned.

"Detest your impudence!" cried Branscombe. "What folly brings you here again?"

"Yourn," quoth Dick. "And do you be mighty glad I be here before the Sheriff!"

"The Sheriff?"

"The plot's blown upon. The game's up. They're mustering yeomen to Newbury and Reading. The Sheriff's a-riding for you with his posse. 'Twill make a pretty tale against you, you caught fooling here with a lass."

My lord swore a great oath.

"I will hold the house against him. I will make good upon him though he bring all the county."

"Aw, you do talk like as if you was in liquor. To be sure 'tis much the same to have a lass wi' you. Hold this house, which is but a pleasance, an eggshell to crack 'twixt two fingers! Aw dear! And wi' these popinjays o' servants against the Sheriff's yeomen! Aw dear, aw dear!"

"Do you think I will be taken like a sheep, sirrah?" my lord cried, trembling with rage.

"For sure you will if here you do stay."

My lord swore at him.

Dick lounged across the room and clapped him on the shoulder.

"Out on it, man; pluck up heart and do some'at! Never be made a mock to all the world. A silly show! Bah! Take horse and ride—ride and gather your men."

"By Heaven that's well said, fellow!" my lord cried. "I'll away to Sir Stephen this hour."

"Ay, to Sir Stephen, surely," Dick agreed, who had never heard of him before.

My lord strode in a dramatic attitude of thought; then, muttering rhythmically, "I knew their fear would make them strike me first!" he rushed out.

Dick turned from watching the curtain fall behind him, and looked down at Mary Rymingtowne, much as you may conceive a tiger regarding its forward whelp, large, cold, and grim. To all the swift talk she had not put a word. Through it all she sat silent and never stirred, looking with wide eyes of alarm at Dick.

My lord was hardly gone before he put his head in again.

"You will be safe," he panted. "You are in no danger. Heart of my heart——"

"What's yon that I hear?" Dick growled, who indeed heard nothing. My lord fled out.

They were left still looking at each other. Dick and his tigerish stare against the bewildered fear in her eyes, like a child when it dreads unreasoning strength. Then he jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"Yon's a pretty thing to go riding with, my lass. You might ha' chose one which was braver nor a Jack rabbit. What's he running from now, if 'e please? Naught but a turnip and a sheet as I showed him, like boys playing ghosties."

"What do you mean?" she cried.

Dick laughed.

"To be sure there's no Sheriff nor no yeomen, and I could a'most believe there's no plot neither. Only he told me so. See here, my lass. When I found that Jack o' Green was running after you, I put myself in his way to ask him what he was to do such. Before I knew it, he was babbling out that he was in a plot to pull down the Queen and put Mary o' Scots and the filthy French over us. So I let the fool think I was in it, too, and he gave me a letter to one of his fine friends in Paris that's enough to hang him for the traitor he is. I kept it safe, you be sure, for them as will know how to use it. But when he played these chap-book antics with you, I thought it would be good for you if I showed you first what a skimble-skamble fool he is. Look at him now, scuttering like a rat for naught but a fellow that comes wi' a tale and mocks at him. For there's none after him, my lass, but your father, that'll be here soon to take you home and box your ears."

Her face was flaming.

"Is it all true?" she gasped.

"Bide a bit and you'll see."

"About the letter?" He plucked it out and gave it her. She took it in trembling fingers, saw the seal, and read in my lord's hand the superscription to M. D'Elbœuf. She gave a little cry. "Is it—is it indeed?"

"'Twould hang a better man nor your popinjay, my lass," Dick drawled.

She bent down and hid her face in her hands, and was shuddering with sobs. A clashing sound startled her. She

looked up pale, and saw through her tears Dick holding a tinder-box and blowing the sparks to flame. He took the letter and lit it, and grinned at her as it floated in glowing flakes to the ground. Her lips parted! she tried to say something, and was very sweetly piteous. Dick did not come to her or speak, but his face grew sombre and stern.

"And now—now?" she murmured, and her voice was a cry for pardon and something kindlier. "Ah, what's that?" The din of hurrying horsemen broke upon them.

"'Twill be father coming to box your ears," quoth Dick cheerily. "To be sure, 'tis time. And now—now I'll be going away again."

"Away again?" she repeated like an echo, pale to her lips.

"Ay, and here's to mind you while I be gone." He plucked from his belt an Eastern dagger, and thrust it upon her against her bosom. "You—you wait and keep it clean."

The blood flooded her face again, and she shook.

Dick stood over her! only turned away when Mr. Rymington rushed in.

"Eh, you ha' no call to puff," he drawled. "She'll do well enough. I ha' scared my lord off. Told him you'll have his blood. But don't 'e trouble. You'd find none in him."

He thrust past the amazed man, and out and away.

CHAPTER XVIII

UP CHANNEL

ALDERMAN FRY was busy as an ant and pompous as a stag-beetle. So said the Mayor. But he had a name for wit to keep up and a grudge against the alderman, who would not buy from his ropewalk. The alderman was inspired by a consciousness of heroism and a year's balance on the wrong side. Not another man in all the corporation of Bristol had ever had to face the loss of a stout ship to the heathen pirates of Barbary. Not a merchant venturer in all England had ever been taken by the pirates and escaped without ransom by the might of his own hands. So the alderman said frequently, and accounted himself the most venturous of merchant venturers. He was in this comfortable mood, he was strenuously gathering business again

into his grip, when Dick Rymingtowne returned to disturb him. Dick Rymingtowne and the old boatswain, Nick Antony.

The boatswain, as I infer, was doubtful of their welcome: pronouncing that the alderman had no more blood in him than a kippered herring, and opining therefore that he would not remember so well how they had with pains and peril redeemed him as how they had put him in jeopardy; not how they had miraculously preserved his carcass but how they had cheated him out of a ship and lost her. For which good reasons he expected little of Alderman Fry. Dick was more hopeful.

"Th' old rogue hath a gleam o' red in his eyes whiles," quoth he. "Maybe he can be a fool as well as his betters."

So on a spring morning of 1560 into Alderman Fry's counting-house Dick Rymingtowne slouched, with Antony rolling in his wake.

"God bless you," he drawled. "How's all wi' you? Ha' you aught a-doing as we can do?"

The alderman laughed.

"Would you kidnap me for another voyage, you rascal?"

"Oh, ay, if 'twas convenient."

"Thou'rt a brazen rogue," the alderman chuckled. "What's in thy big head now?"

Dick scratched it.

"Naught but to see if you had aught in yourn. Not expecting that neither. You'm but a merchant after all."

The alderman went on being amused. Such wit was doubtless adapted to him. But I have always supposed that he had that kindness for Dick which surly tempers are apt to form for him who treats them more surlily. And also he had intentions.

There was at no time, I suppose, much amiable in Alderman Fry. He was greedy and he was hard, but he had the virtues as well as the vices of the masculine. He believed absurdly in backing his friends, and yet more passionately in risk and danger and the throwing of good money after bad. Thus virtues and vices wrought in him to one purpose.

"Art for the sea again?" quoth he.

"There's too many of your kind for me to find a living on land."

"You'll find a living as long as there's a crust to steal, my lad," the alderman assured him. "Are you about a new venture?" Dick looked very cunning and tapped his nose. "Well, would ye have a mind to one of mine?"

"I'll hear of it," Dick drawled.

"The black heathen are the richer by a good ship of mine." The alderman grew earnest. "And I've no will to forget it. Now we saw well enough that a cunning mariner with a crew that would fight could find occasion to harry them soundly. And more profit in the plunder of one of their rich holds than a dozen honest voyages. Why, if your Doricot had not been a mad knight-errant we had come home as rich as Gresham."

"We'll have no ill of him that's dead," quoth Dick sulkily. "And died better nor you will withal. Let be—let be! Well, so you've a mind to make good out of the heathen? I am the man for that."

"So I say," the alderman agreed heartily. "And what will you put to the venture?"

"Not a groat more than myself. Which is a fortune more than you're worth."

The alderman was something sobered by that, but soon they came to concord. And so Dick Rymingtowne went sailing out of Bristol master of the ship *Reckoning*, which bore a crew half as large again as she needed, and a musket for every man. This seems to prove that it was Dick Rymingtowne and not Don John, or the Dorias, who divined that the way for a sailing-ship to meet the galleys in a calm was by the fire of small-arms.

They sailed to shifty breezes, and they had but just weathered Lundy when a wind came out of the west, and they had to beat against it tediously, seeing much more of the Cornish cliffs than the boatswain liked. But he was, for a fat man, very apprehensive. That is doubtless why Dick Rymingtowne, who had himself no turn for apprehension, clave to him. Dick was wholly cheerful, while the boatswain grumbled oaths continuously. When they saw the open sea to southward, he puffed out relief.

"Praise be we'm out o' the narrows. Land's a thing I do ne'er want to see unless I be on it," and he cursed the wind again.

"You be thankful for your mercies," Dick grinned; "and you'll see a deal o' land yet this voyage."

With that he put the helm over and the ship before the wind. The boatswain was for a while speechless. Then,

"You'm making up Channel," he exploded, which was indeed plain enough. The pillars of Land's End were already under the port quarter.

"Up Channel it is."

" 'Tis a strange road to Barbary, to my thinking."

" There's pirates nearer than Barbary," Dick grinned.

He had not crossed France with his ears shut. He had not been in and out of Channel ports on both sides to learn nothing.

" What's your will? " the boatswain gasped. " You'm never minded to go against the Fowey gallants or the Dartmouth men? Nay, now, nay; hawks'll not pick out hawks' eyes, as the saying goes. 'Tis not Christian, to be sure. And if we do meddle wi' un, us'll never dare show in the West Country. And they'm honest lads which never touch naught but foreigners."

" And thou'rt o' the West Country thyself, Nick," Dick grinned. " Spare your wind, will ye? I'll leave Devon be and the Duchy withal. There's pirates both sides o' Channel. I'm for the Dunkirkers. Many a fat bottom running for Antwerp they sharks grab. Well now, if we do lie off and on till we see one which hath filled his maw, and lay aboard him then, we'll have as much as a voyage is worth, and us not a week out of Bristol."

The boatswain stared at him for some time, and then said stolidly:

" Ye could never do it twice. The whole nest o' the rogues would be a-watching for you."

" D'ye take me for a fool? Would I try the same thing twice the same way? "

" Nay," the boatswain grumbled, " 'tis not a fool I do think 'e surely," and continued to look at him as though he were a queer invention.

They were somewhere off the Wight when the wind failed. It had been too hot for comfort ever since they made out of Bristol. Now in the calm they had sunshine blazing all day long from a sky that was never blue, and heavy, lifeless air. There was nothing to do but sweat and spit and grumble at the beer. All this they did vehemently. Then a grey-blue swell of fog rolled up Channel and engulfed them. For days they saw neither land nor sun nor stars. The fog seemed to numb the spirit of them as well as their senses, and a crew of rascals as keen as ever left Avonmouth grew dull and listless and whined forebodings. They had some reason. A wind moved in the fog shiftily, and where they were no man knew. It was chance, perhaps; perhaps it was the boatswain's queer inhuman instinct for shoal-water—he spent days and nights in the bows—that saved them from the dunes and the Grey Nose. Once they had

something like a panic when half the crew swore it was church bells that they heard chiming no more than a cable's length away. But the boatswain pronounced them ship-bells, and Dick with fist and foot beat into the fearful the assurance that they were making peril out of a fishing fleet from Hastings or Rye. Neither fishing fleet nor church they ever saw, and by nightfall there was a tale afoot that the bells were ghostly, an omen of wreck.

But in the night the fog began to thin. Some of those who kept the middle watch talked of ships' lanterns, others of stars. At dawn they were still alone in a grey cloud, but they could see some little way. Soon after dawn they heard firing to southward. Before noon the fog melted in heavy rain, and away to starboard they saw white water and a low coast. A freshening westerly wind served them, and they stood away, subdued in spirit but grumbling at the captain who had taken them up Channel into these perils instead of southward. Dick was very genially grim.

Then they saw a lugger—a French craft—making mighty bad weather of it. The *Reckoning* came up on her fast. Her rigging was queer, and soon they made out that her hull had shot-holes.

"There's the girl we ha' waited for," Dick grinned.

The boatswain dashed the rain out of his eyes.

"A hath been fighting, surely."

Dick bade pipe to quarters.

"Try her with one of your long guns, Jerry," he said to the gunner.

"Go easy," the boatswain protested. "'Tis thick yet, and who knows what's by? Maybe we'll have all the Dunkirk fleet on us."

"Oh, maybe we'll die if we live long enough."

At the third shot they brought her foremast down. She had not fired an answering gun. They ran alongside and grappled and boarded fore and aft. Her deck was all wreckage and wounded men—more wreck than their fire had made, more men helpless than the crushing mast had struck down. There was hardly a show of fight. Wearily, sullenly, the Frenchmen let themselves be bound. Not many needed bonds. Dick shouted in his bad French for their captain, and a little man with a bloody bandage about his head limped forward.

"Pardon, monsieur. You are a little late. I regret that I

could give you no entertainment. Six hours earlier, and I should have had the pleasure to annihilate you. I cannot enough regret."

Such graces were not in Dick's nature.

"That's well crowed," he growled. "You go aboard there and we'll come to business."

The Frenchman shrugged.

"I see that you have no soul. It is to me a humiliation."

Dick snarled at him. Dick was not gentle in showing him the way down to his cabin. When they were there,

"And now—you which crows so fine—what ha' you got aboard?"

The Frenchman made a grimace and a gesture.

"Splinters, and blood and death," he said theatrically.

Dick stretched over the table.

"Look 'e, my lad; I talk to you polite because you're beat. If you give me trouble, by God you shall have it! What I want to know will come out as well wi' a knotted cord as fair words."

"My compliments on your politeness," the Frenchman shrugged. "But it is as I have the honour to tell you. There is, alas! nothing of value aboard my ship but the blood of my poor fellows and their death."

"It's a lie," Dick growled, and the Frenchman put up his eyebrows in amused contempt. "You had but just took a ship."

"Perfectly," the Frenchman smiled. "And it will certainly be a great pleasure to you to know that it was of your compatriots. You have, therefore, the honour to rescue her captain and restore him his cargo. A deed so heroic!"

"Bah! What was his cargo?"

"Alas! you have no *esprit*. Always the man of business. But do not be discouraged. Monsieur can still be heroic, without hurting the feelings of his pocket. The cargo was nothing but tar and fagots. It will be no loss to restore them to your compatriot, whom I wish with all my heart I had never seen. Set him afloat on his tar-barrels; I give you my permission."

"Cargo of tar and fagots?" Dick frowned. "What a plague should a ship do with such?"

"It is what I asked myself. It is also what I asked your compatriot, the red-haired captain. He would only answer

rudely that I was a pirate. Which was not *àpropos*. Nevertheless, it is as I have the honour to tell you. You will find the tar aboard my poor ship. And also your compatriot. I abandoned his fagots. And his ship, which was indeed no better than fagots."

At this moment a man came to tell Dick that aboard the French lugger they had found Scotsmen tied up. Dick bade them bring their leader, and turned on the Frenchman.

"Scots they are. You said he was my countryman."

The Frenchman shrugged.

"Scots—English—you talk the same kind of French. It is all the same. Both of you—you have no soul, and, what is worse, no *esprit*."

Dick snarled and strode out. The boatswain met him on the poop.

"Have you gutted her?" he grunted.

"There's naught but tar-barrels in her, and that's queer, I allow."

"Get the men aboard and cast off and make sail," Dick drawled, and began to pull at his lip.

The boatswain nodded.

"Ay, ay, we'm wool-gathering, to be sure."

But Dick brooded over the water. He turned at the grate of a Scots oath and found himself fronting a gaunt fellow with a shock of red hair, who demanded hoarsely where he was and what Dick was, and what had come of the French devil. Dick nodded at him: "Do 'e come and see, my lad," and down to the cabin they went.

The Scot passed the doorway, saw the Frenchman, and stormed in French, which was chiefly Scots. The Frenchman was a filthy pirate, and no seaman at all. He was a treacherous villain in the pay of those idolatrous tyrants the Guises,—a pirate, a hired murderer. Nevertheless, it should not profit him or his accursed masters.

Dick scratched his head. It was all mysterious and very interesting. He tapped the Scot's shoulder.

"Ay, ay, my lad, that's what he is. Now what be you if you please?"

The Scot was ready enough. He was James Ferguson, out of Leith, captain of the hoy *Agnes*, and captured, crew and all, and his boat pillaged and sunk by the piratical Frenchmen.

"You'll ha' lost a fortune, to be sure," Dick sympathized.

The Scot seemed to hesitate a moment. Then he talked loud of ruin.

Dick nodded.

"Ay, ay, tar'll be dear in Leith. And fagots too. But if they be worth so much in Scotland, why would you take 'em to sea?"

The Scot stared at him, desired, with an oath, to know what affair it was of his, demanded to be let go.

"Let ye go, quotha!" Dick gaped. "To be sure, who's keeping you? Fly away and welcome. I ha' no will to find you victuals."

The Scot was something discomfited. The Frenchman, who understood nothing of their English talk, but saw his retreat, gave a saturnine laugh. Dick allowed himself to grin. The Scot stared from one to the other, and then broke out at Dick. They were making game of him. They had some device together. Was Dick English? Let him answer that.

"God ha' mercy! Answer ye!" Dick said. "What's this of devising together? I find you aboard a dirty French pirate that attacked me, and you tell me I be standing wi' he! Am I English? Be you in your senses?"

"If ye be English, ma mon," quoth the Scot haughtily, "look to it what way ye deal by me, or I'll hae ye mak' answer to your admiral."

Dick frowned.

"Hoity-toity! What ha' you or I to do wi' admirals?"

"Ye'll beat up for Dover and put me ashore," the Scot went on in the same tone, "or it'll be the worse for you later."

Dick looked him up and down.

"You'm not born shy, my lad. For a fellow that's found on a French pirate, you do talk very pretty." Then suddenly he changed his tone. "Fiend, away with you! Would you give me orders on my own ship?" He shouted for men, and bade them take the two away forward and tie them up apart.

Then he went on deck.

CHAPTER XIX

INTO CALAIS

THE *Reckoning* ran fast before the wind, and the sky was brightening. Not far ahead, hove to, lay some small craft and a big ship. The boatswain waddled up to him.

"Same course?" Dick nodded. "Keep her steady on the wild-goose, as you might say," the boatswain grumbled.

Dick stared at him stupidly.

"What's yon?" he drawled, and pointed to the small craft.

The boatswain puckered his little eyes and looked long.

"North-Country craft. Scots, I do allow. And what'll they be doing hove to there, says you. They'm on a wild-goose-chase like to we, surely."

"Look!" Dick nodded. The Scottish craft were making signals. It was soon plain that they wanted speech of the *Reckoning*. One of them lowered a boat. Dick hove his ship to and waited.

There came aboard a man altogether unlike the surly, blustering captive of the Frenchman, a man very neat, very precise, and very bland. He much regretted delaying Dick. He spoke of friendly nations and mariners' good fellowship. The matter was that in the fog he had parted company from one of his consorts. They were going round from Leith to Southampton with herrings and other matters. In the fog a French pirate had come upon them. There had been fighting, and he hoped that the pirate had been beaten off. But when the fog lifted one of his little fleet—a hoy—was nowhere to be seen. He was anxious to know whether Dick had sighted her, or, if not her, the pirate.

Dick was as amiable as he was mighty sorry, but had seen naught. They filthy pirates were the plague of the narrow seas. It was villainous that English mariners should suffer them. But, to be sure, he had seen no pirate, and therefore made bold to hope the best. Very like they had given the knave more good Scottish iron than he could digest. And their consort, which maybe had but lost her bearings in the fog, might yet join them safe and sound. So a cup of wine was drunk and the best of friends they parted.

"Same course?" the boatswain grunted.

"Hold right on," quoth Dick, and drew away and leaned over the bulwarks, according to his manner when he was puzzled.

The puzzle complicated itself. Why was this second Scots captain so oily? Why was his fleet made up of one stout ship, high-charged and carrying guns, and two little ramshackle hoys? Why did he say that they were freighted with herrings, when

there was evidence that one of them had nothing aboard but fagots and tar?

The first Scot was indeed still more mysterious than the second. He was plainly something of a dolt. It was natural that, having lost his temper, he should run wild and babble vain things. But why these particular vain things? Why threaten of English admirals? What had a Scot do to with them? That he should curse the Frenchman who had taken him was wholly natural too. But why talk of Papists and the Guises? What should a rover of Dunkirk have to do with religion? All would be fish that came to his net. Why should he care for the house of Guise? They had no traffic with sea or seamen. And why, in the name of all things wonderful, should a Scot, sailing a little worthless hoy, suppose that the great Duc de Guise cared whether he sank or swam? Had the Guise some interest in fagots and tar? The more Dick thought the more absurd he found the whole affair. And yet he was the more certain that the secret of it was something in no way absurd, but wholly serious and marketable.

He bade them bring the Frenchman to his cabin, and with him a quart of sack. The Frenchman came, and when he was signalled to sit down, yawned profoundly.

"Alas! I believed that I had done with you for a while."

Dick grinned.

"You thought as I had no mind to you."

"I dared to hope so, monsieur. It is the only way you could flatter me."

Dick filled him a mug of sack.

"You thought as I could make naught of your joking at me."

"I trust," the Frenchman spoke with some anxiety, but stopped to drink—"I trust from my heart that I was not wrong. Do not tell me that you understood me, monsieur, I beg. That would be humiliating."

Dick guffawed.

"We'll get on well, you and me."

"You become familiar," said the Frenchman coldly. "Let us understand one another. You have destroyed my ship. I wish you all the ill in the world. I will mock at you with pleasure. I would destroy you if I could. Otherwise I will have no relation with you."

"You wait, my lad. Look 'e, I shot down your mast, but your lugger was as rackety as a hencoop before. The Scottish

guns had done her business. Now what if I was to help you to a tit for tat with the Scots, and maybe what would buy you another boat?"

The Frenchman stared.

"You babble, my friend. What good would that do you? And you—you are a man of business."

"If I could do without you, to be sure I would not want you," Dick grinned. "But there's that which I cannot see through of myself. And if you stand with me, I'll play you fair. 'Tis the use of your wits I want."

"Monsieur, I can well believe it."

"And what you know o' Dunkirk and Boulogne and Calais."

"Monsieur, I am a Frenchman and not a traitor."

"Well, and I am English," Dick said, "but I could be a traitor as well as my betters. You're frightened o' bogies. But you wait till I ask you for treason. 'Tis this Scot troubles me."

"A blot on the world, monsieur, I confess."

"What was he doing with his fagots and tar? And there's more of these Scottish hoys with the same cargo. And with them the one high-charged ship which fought you. What's the plan? A ship o' guns with a string o' tenders all fagots and tar. What's that mean but fireships?"

The Frenchman stared long and then drank deep. "Pardon," said he, "you are not altogether without intelligence."

"Ay, but who's the fellow they mean their fireships for? That red-haired lubber, he said you was hired by the Guise. Why should he think the Duc de Guise wanted him scuttled? Was he in a plot against the Guise's plots? What's the Guise to do afloat? He's no sailor as ever I heard."

The Frenchman broke into a cackling laugh. He held out his hand.

"Monsieur, my excuses. You have genius. It had escaped me. I see it all. *Mordieu*, it is a plan. There is a brain somewhere in these Scots."

"'Tis you to play," said Dick.

"I conceal nothing. I rely on your honour. But, monsieur, at this hour the Guise at Calais makes ready to send his niece Queen Mary back to Scotland. His brothers, M. D'Elbœuf and M. D'Aumale, and the Cardinal of Lorraine, they are to sail with her. You perceive? These fireships, they are to destroy her. They come from the rebels of Scotland."

Dick rubbed his big chin. There was a queer, humorous

light in his eyes. He saw well enough now. Many there were in Scotland who had no desire that Mary Stuart should ever reign. Many in Scotland, and perhaps some in England. Would Queen Elizabeth be lost in grief if something happened to her sweet cousin Mary on the voyage? Was the English fleet standing by to watch the issue of the plot? That would explain why the Scotsman babbled of English admirals.

"Seems to me I ha' something to sell to M. de Guise in Calais," Dick drawled.

"You would venture?" the Frenchman cried. Dick grinned at him. "I offer myself to assist."

"I've a notion the Guise will pay a better price to a man as is no Frenchman."

"You do not trust me, monsieur?"

"Well, to be sure, if you had me ashore in France you might be tempted. And I wouldn't go to lead any man into temptation."

"You do not trust me!" the Frenchman cried tragically.

"Well, say as I would rather ha' you trust me. And you can. But I'll go into Calais alone."

When Dick went on deck the Frenchman was with him. The wind held still, but more lightly. The sky was cloudless and mellowing. Away to westward off the cliffs of Gris Nez they could see the Scottish ships beating to and fro, questing still for their lost consort. The low French coast came nearer, all golden in the evening light. The walls and turrets of Calais, the crowded masts, stood close. Dick altered his course and bore away to northward. He looked over the side.

"Tide'll be setting up the straits awhile yet."

"It turns at sunset," the Frenchman agreed.

The Scottish ships, it seemed, had resolved that their search was hopeless. They gathered together, and were standing eastward in the wake of the *Reckoning*. She passed Calais, and still held on, steering as though she was bound for Antwerp or some port in Flanders.

"To be sure there's naught suspicious in us," Dick said.

Night fell. Land and Scottish ships were lost. But the *Reckoning* hoisted no lantern at mast or bow. There was no glimmer of light from her. She lay with all sails furled, silent and dark on the dark water, drifting on the ebb tide. Back with the tide she came till the lights of Calais were abeam. Then a boat sped from her shoreward.

CHAPTER XX

THE QUEEN SAILS

DICK steered on the glowing beacon that marked the harbour mouth. As they drew near they heard a cry from it, and the clatter of men in a hurry. The land closed upon them on either hand, and they were challenged. Then a pinnace came crashing alongside to a medley of shouts. Lanterns blazed. The boat was held fore and aft.

"Who are you that break the laws of the port? No boat enters Calais harbour by night."

"News for the Duc de Guise, my friends," quoth Dick placidly. "News for the Duc de Guise out of England."

"Who brings it?"

"Dick Draper, a mariner out of Rye. Oh, none that the Duke knows, but news which he hath need to hear. News touching Queen Mary."

"If you know so much, you ought to know that M. le Duc is not at Calais."

For a moment Dick doubted his Frenchman. But he let no doubt show as he answered:

"Well, and he has brothers to speak for him, hath he not? You're doing him ill-service who keep me from speech of them."

"You shall have all the speech you need," came the answer. "Tow them to the bastion."

At the stone steps of the bastion they were bidden land, and there were huddled together by halberdiers.

"Keep them in guard," cried the truculent voice from the pinnace. "You—the captain—Draper—what do you call yourself? Come aboard."

Dick came at his leisure, drawling out:

"You ha' no call to be aught but civil. I came of my own good will out o' good will to you. I——"

He was struck down to wallow in the stern sheets.

"Keep that for the Cardinal."

In a moment they came alongside a big, low craft, a galley gleaming with light from every cabin. The truculent master of the pinnace swung aboard, was gone a little while, and came back to drag Dick after him. Firmly held between two soldiers, with the master of the pinnace leading, Dick was brought to a

cabin where sat a clean-shaven man all red robes. He was plump and handsome; he smiled generously, but there was something cruel in his face. Dick guessed him the Cardinal of Lorraine—fancied that to cardinals one ought to kneel—concluded that he had best not know too much of what he ought to do; and so, the soldiers permitting, plucked off his hat. For the rest, he looked stupid.

"Dick Draper, out of Rye, if you please," he said, and gasped as one overcome by greatness.

"You are condemned to be hanged, Dick Draper," said the Cardinal pleasantly. Dick gaped. "If a man comes to Calais by night, it is the law of the port that he is hanged from the bastion. You knew that, doubtless."

"Now that's hard, surely," Dick whined. "Me, which came to help the Guise and Queen Mary."

"You are benevolent, Dick Draper," the Cardinal smiled. "Well, my friend, you have put your neck in a noose. Why?"

"For to serve you, to be sure. And to turn a penny for myself, I don't deny, if you will be so good. Why else, my lord?"

"Why else is in effect the question," the Cardinal smiled. "The Guise knows how to reward service, though it is but the service of a Dick Draper. And also how to punish treachery, though it be but Dick Draper's."

Dick gave a roar of laughter.

"Treachery, says you! Me in an open boat with six mariners! What treachery should I do? Nay, I bring you news." Though the Cardinal's smooth face did not change, Dick saw that he was doing well. "You hear me, and say if hanging is what I am worth."

The Cardinal laughed gently.

"I shall not hesitate, my friend. Go on."

But as Dick opened his mouth a woman swept into the room. She was silver-grey and white and black. She was very lithe and slight, so that she seemed rather a phantom of light and shadow than a mortal body. Yet she bore a woman's graces finely wrought, and for all her fragility she was not small, and strength was alert in her. Her face was thin and pale, but of a calm beauty. It told nothing of her nature. It had in its mystery a compelling charm. Her hair flamed bronze and gold beneath a cap embroidered with pearls.

"Why—who is this, my lord?" she cried sharply.

"I am finding out," the Cardinal said. "I doubt he is nothing," and looked a wish that she should leave them.

But Dick cried out:

"Is that madame the Queen? I ha' news for you, madame, if you please. News out of England."

Mary of Scots looked him over, and it seems that he drew himself up and stood square. He must have been a sturdy, lusty figure of a man for all his loose limbs. She smiled.

"Speak out, then, good fellow." The Cardinal made as if he would rise, but she stayed him with one thin hand on his shoulder. "Speak out. Have no fear."

"Which, by your leave, I ha' not," said Dick, and she smiled a little. There may have been a laugh in his eyes. He went on with his tale adroitly. "It was in the fog. There came into Rye a Scottish hoy which had lost her way. And the captain, calling himself Jamie Ferguson, he fell a-drinking in the taverns and he talked."

"Wait!" the Cardinal broke in sharply. He waved his hand to the soldiers. "You may go."

Dick was left alone with Cardinal and Queen.

"He is not very terrible, I think," she smiled.

Dick's lazy eye gleamed at her.

"There's those in Scotland think you terrible, madame, so it seems. For they ha' no mind that you should ever come there." He saw her hand close on the Cardinal's shoulder, a spasm in her face. "This fellow, this Jamie Ferguson, let out as he came from Leith, and two other hoys all laden with fagots and tar, and a big ship with guns. And the plan is that when you do sail for Scotland, madame, o' some calm night, the hoys should be brought foul o' your ship and set o' fire. For they hope to do your business so; or else the other, the big thing, taking you in your confusion, will sink you wi' her guns. That's my news, madame."

The Cardinal bent his brows, and looked Dick through and through. The Queen's face was drawn. She bent and whispered to the Cardinal's ear in Latin.

"You see—these Scotsmen—already they would murder me. If I go, I go to be sacrificed."

Dick did not understand, but he read her fear plain.

In the same language, in the same low tone, the Cardinal answered:

"It does not become you to fear. You are of the blood of Guise."

She drew in her breath, took her hand from his shoulder, stepped back a pace, and stood erect.

"You forget yourself, my lord," she said. "I was born a Queen."

And Dick, who had understood nothing, saw that her fear was gone.

"I think it likely you have spoken truly, Dick Draper," he said. "Your tale matches with rumours we have heard of others. Else I might not have believed it. What do you want of me?"

The Cardinal bent his head, showed no resentment, sympathy, or other feeling.

"What it's worth," said Dick sharply. "Would you say five hundred pound was too much for a Queen?"

"You shall be paid." The Cardinal spoke with careless contempt. There was a moment's pause, and then for the first time Dick saw something genial in his face. "If I read you right, you are something better than a seller of tavern talk."

"There's more than talk I've to sell to be sure," Dick grinned. "Now as I came across Channel I saw Scottish hoys and their big ship lying in the offing here waiting for you. Well, you'll be wanting to sail quick. Though you be ready for the worst they can do, you'll not want to take madame here upon more risk than needs be. So then, give me a fast sailing lugger for the open boat I came in, and I'll make an end of those fireships. To-night, if the wind serves, we'll board them, the morrow night o' the latest—it's but two or three men they carry—we'll put the torch to them. Is that worth another five hundred pound, my lord?"

"You expect me to trust you then?" The Cardinal smiled. "Prithee, Dick Draper of Rye, why should I not send out my own men?"

"And if they fail of it, if the big ship takes them, here's a pretty tale for madame's coming to Scotland—how her uncle sends out o' Calais pirates to harry honest Scottish boats. Nay, let me go, and if I burn 'em, all's well, and if they take me, as they will not, 'tis no blame o' yours. None would call me French."

"I think not," the Cardinal laughed.

"Well, then. If your sentries on the bastion see a blaze at sea to-night, you are to know the sea's clear for madame. If there's no fire till to-morrow night, you wait till the day after.

But if you see naught before then, send out and sweep the sea yourself."

The Queen laughed merrily.

"He gives us his leave, our Dick Draper."

Dick jerked a bow at her and laughed back. He looked at her a moment and made a step forward. What odd notion was in his head he does not seem to have been sure. He was vividly conscious that he was a man and she a woman.

She did not draw back or turn away. Her eyes still mocked him. She held out her hand.

Dick took it, let it rest frail on his hard, dark fingers a moment too long. Then he went down on his knee and duly kissed it. As he rose he looked in her eyes again, and again she laughed.

It seems that he always believed there was never a woman like her: never another who could demand of a man so much.

Then he sailed away from her with a swift lugger and a thousand pounds. At an hour before midnight he left Calais harbour. The sky was clear, but, by good fortune, the moon was not to rise till close upon dawn. The wind held still. He had picked his half-dozen men well, and whatever was in their heads, they were content to obey without babbling. The first difficult business was to find their own ship. The Scotch craft were easily seen, for they, fearful of fouling each other, bore their lanterns like honest boats. But the *Reckoning* was lost in the night. The boatswain had his orders to keep her a little to windward of the Scots, between them and the land. Dick's lugger beat to and fro some time while he fumed in rare impatience, before a high poop loomed up above her, and they hailed discreetly, and ran alongside.

It was the Frenchman he sought first, and the Frenchman rushed upon him crying, "What fortune? What fortune?"

Dick held off his exuberance, one big hand on his shoulder.

"Ha' you a mind to earn yourself another boat and a hundred pound?"

The Frenchman laughed at him.

"Have I a mind? Have I a mind to my salvation?"

"Well, maybe you had best do without that," Dick grinned.

"How many men was there o' the hoy you took?"

"Four!" the Frenchman swore and spat. "No more than four. It was the big fellow that did our damage."

"Four, and there's a dozen o' your fellows fit to fight. Well, then. Take them aboard that Calais lugger and run down close on the hoys. I'll answer for the big ship. When you hear my guns,

lay aboard the hoy that's nearest, and master her and set her afire. Then the same wi' the other. It should be all done in half an hour, if you be smart. Fireships, to be sure! We'll give them fireships. And when you've done your business steer nor'-east, and you'll find me wi' a hundred pound for you."

The Frenchman stared speechless. It is certain that the terms were generous. You may wonder why Dick chose to let the Frenchman share his profit. I wonder why, since he had his money safe, he took the trouble to do anything. But, after all, when he made a bargain of his own choice, he preferred as a rule to stand by it. I think he had a taste for the Frenchman. I am sure, from those queer hints in his papers, that Mary of Scots had waked in him emotions.

The Frenchman began to gush thanks, and boast, and was swiftly checked.

"I'll give you a barrel o' powder to help the fire along. I'll give you pikes and cutlasses for your men. God bless you, I'll give you those Scotsmen that you took. For maybe they'd be a nuisance to me."

So the surly Scottish captain and his two men were flung into the lugger's cabin. With her crew of Frenchmen all quivering excitement, she drew away from the *Reckoning*. A mile away to leeward the lights of the Scottish flotilla dipped and twinkled.

The *Reckoning* made sail while Dick talked to his gunner. His long guns, demi-cannon, had a range of some three-quarters of a mile, and threw a thirty-pound shot. He wanted to put the big Scottish ship out of action, yet take no harm himself. It was idle to risk firing at full range by night. There was some chance of damage if they ran close. I suppose that Dick cared little whether he failed or not. He felt it worth trying to see whether he could do it, and for the sport of it. Since he had nothing to care for but running away, he had no fear of the issue. And chance and his gunner brought him success.

The *Reckoning*, all dark, ran as close to the lights as the gunner asked, and as she passed fired all her broadside of six. Its thunder was still rolling over the sea while her youngers scurried aloft and shook out every stitch of sail. Before the wind the *Reckoning* drew away fast. Dick conceived that he had risked enough for the sake of his emotions.

But there was no need of haste. No gun answered that broadside. When the *Reckoning* drew clear of the smoke they saw that the highest lights of the flotilla were blotted out. They heard

the crash of falling timber and shouts. A moment more and a tongue of flame leapt out of the sea. The Frenchman had fallen to his work.

The glow astern faded out into the dawn twilight. The breeze freshened, and on the *Reckoning* they shortened sail. Soon the Frenchman's lugger came chasing them, and a jovial shout brought the news. The big ship had her main-mast shot away. The hoys had been burnt, and all was well. It was to be expected that the big fellow would drift ashore between Calais and Gravelines. The *Reckoning* hove to, and the lugger ran under her quarter, and Dick tossed a bag of money aboard.

"God bless you, and you forget you ever saw me. I'll swear I never saw you," he cried, and the Frenchman waved his hand and bade him "*Au diable! Au revoir!*" Then the *Reckoning* went about, and keeping in mid-channel or something to the English side, beat westward again.

That afternoon, as the wind was falling towards sunset, a great galley and two high-charged ships passed them steering northward. Through the flood of light they saw the standards of Scotland and France. Mary Stuart had bidden her last farewell to the land she loved. Dick stood a long while gazing after her, and only turned when the boatswain tapped him on the shoulder and pointed to sails ahead.

They came on fast, and soon they were made out English ships of war.

"God ha' mercy, here's the admirals!" Dick grinned to himself. They started signalling from afar. They sent a boat to board him, and a lordly creature, Admiral Winter, was obsequiously received. Dick's ship had come through the straits? To be sure, out of Flushing, sailing for Plymouth. Had she seen any Scottish craft? Why, there was a galley, and some big ships flying both Scottish blazons and French—very haughty and grand. Admiral Winter betrayed impatience, even bad temper. He seemed to dislike excessively the tale of those standards of Scotland and France.

"Begging your pardon, surely," Dick protested. "You did ask what I seed."

"I saw that myself, fellow," said the Admiral tartly. "Have you seen naught else under a Scottish flag?"

Dick scratched his head.

"To be sure, there was a fellow yesterday, a big ship with some queer little tubs about him, hailed to ask if I had come upon

French pirates. They did snap up one of his tubs seemly, and take her into Calais. But I seed naught o' they, thanks be. And no more o' he neither. Maybe they got he, too, last night."

The admiral muttered an oath, and turned away without courtesy. Then he checked himself and came back to bid Dick forget all about him.

"Why, that's hard, too. So fine as your honour is," Dick protested. "But to be sure, I ha' never seed you nor you I neither. See, there's the Frenchy-Scotty galley." He pointed northward. "She'm well away, to be sure."

The Admiral with another oath went over the side, Dick humbly attendant.

"So that was his talk of admirals," Dick communed with himself. "England was in the play, too. Well, God ha' mercy, she hath beat England this game," and he watched the little fleet, now tiny dark things in the horizon.

So Mary of Scots was brought safe to her realm and the fortune which waited her there, and the *Reckoning* sailed away to her proper business on the coasts of Barbary.

CHAPTER XXI

THE MAN ON THE CARRACK

THERE was complicated war in the Mediterranean Sea. From Gibraltar to Syria the galleys of the Barbary pirates cruised, hunting Christian ships, and plundered and slew abundantly. They in their turn were hunted. The Knights of Malta, who were poor and desperate, found them useful prey. In its portly, respectable fashion the navy of Genoa did intermittent execution upon them. The Emperor Charles, when he happened to remember them, would gather armadas. But there was never an end of them. Whenever Christendom was irritated into united endeavour against them, they drew together under Kheyr-ed-Din Barbarossa, the red-bearded Greek, who had made himself King of Algiers and Captain-General of the fleet of the Grand Turk. He was a man to defy the world profitably.

Despite all the perils of piracy, many merchant ships still plied about their business. Europe still craved spices and oils, perfumes and fabrics from the East, and the profits of the trade were the greater for its perils. So there were always seamen enough to

venture on the chance of a safe run, or the fortune of flight or fight. So the pirates never killed all the geese that laid the golden eggs, and they prospered abundantly. But I think there was never a captain of Algiers or Tunis made more out of piracy than Dick Rymingtowne in the *Reckoning*.

Do not misjudge him. He was immaculately virtuous. He only plundered the heathen. No Christian ship was the worse for him. He had too much sense for that. It seems that he even rescued one from desperate plight. Whether he wanted to we will not inquire. He only did it once, and somehow he never had the chance but once. It is plain that he had extraordinary luck in finding pirate galleys full of plunder. Perhaps it was more extraordinary that he should always have missed them completely till all was over with their prey. Yet his fame in Genoa and Malta was of the noblest. He brought so many slaves back to Christendom and freedom. But the pirate galleys, when they laboured back to port battered from the fight, laden deep with spoils, began to keep eager watch to windward for the topmasts of that Bristol ship. That they never caught her I do not wonder at all. The pirates, for all their fighting quality, were poor seamen, and their galleys lubberly craft, no match for a ship handy and well handled, with enough of men and arms. The English shipwrights and the English mariners were soon to prove their mastery on better men than the pirates of Barbary.

Through the bank of St. George at Genoa Dick had sent to Bristol, to Alderman Fry, moneys which surprised that churlish fellow into delight. For he did not know how much stood to Dick's own credit in the Genoese ledgers. A modester man than Dick might have held that his fortune was made. Dick had a great capacity for wanting. So you see the *Reckoning*, best-found of all ships on that sixteenth-century sea, even the youngers in her as gorgeous as gentlemen at Court, beating southward of Malta about her old business.

They sighted a carrack that surprised them. She was a gaudy craft, with painted sails and arabesques of gilding about her fantastic hull. Every line of her warranted her a Turk. A child could have told that she was for parade and pleasure, not war. It was vastly strange that such a holiday craft should come sailing west without escort. Dick suspected a trap. But what trap could there be? There was not a galley in sight, and if there were they could do little. Open sea and a brisk breeze were not conditions in which they could fight. Dick resolved

that there was nothing to fear, crossed her stern, and fired at her.

She answered by setting all her canvas, and plunged away before the wind. She sailed well enough, and her captain understood his business. He kept the masts of the *Reckoning* in a line with his own, so that before Dick could bring a gun to bear he had to put the helm over and stop his ship's way and drop astern. But the English gunners were not to be denied. They shot away the carrack's mizzen, they made her poop a wreck, and she answered her helm no more, fell away, and lay helpless, rolling broadside on to wind and swell. The *Reckoning* ran down and grappled her and boarded. It was no long fight. The carrack's crew did well enough, and her captain better than well, lashing with broken scimitar till he was overborne by sheer weight of men. But in numbers, as in arms, the *Reckoning* had greatly the advantage, and Dick's counted it one of the easiest of all his captures.

When they came to pillage the carrack they were something disappointed. She was richly furnished indeed. She might have served for the yacht of the Grand Turk's chief wife. But she had no cargo. There was little profit in her except in the hull itself. With some hesitation—for he preferred to scuttle his prizes—Dick concluded to take her into Genoa. The crew were brought aboard the *Reckoning*, the wreckage was cut away, and new gear rigged to the rudder-head. The boatswain, Nick Antony, with half a dozen men took charge of her, and she and the *Reckoning* laid a course northward for Genoa.

Then Dick began to see what he could make of his prisoners. The desperate captain, a big fellow, swarthy and handsome in the Turkish fashion, would understand nothing and answer nothing. When Dick threatened, his gloomy brow betrayed no fear or any other feeling save contempt. Some of his crew were as stubborn; some swearing themselves Christian by birth and heart, pressed to the service of the Turk with torture and fear of death, babbled easily all they knew. They had sailed from Constantinople with a fleet of galleys under Kheyr-ed-Din Barbarossa, bound for Algiers. In the squally wind of the day before, the fleet was scattered. During the night their carrack had lost sight of its escort. There was not much to help Dick in all that, but they told him one thing more. Their captain was Dragut Reis.

Now Dragut Reis was a chief among the lieutenants of Kheyr-

ed-Din. If rumour told true, Kheyr-ed-Din valued him more than any man alive, and his ransom must be worth many a prize. It was odd, indeed, that he should be caught upon a ship not built for war; but the reason of that mattered little. Kheyr-ed-Din would pay no less for him.

I do not think that Dick Rymingtowne ever loved courtesy for its own sake. I doubt if he ever wanted to be chivalrous. But he had a sense of humour. So Dragut Reis was unbound and brought to a cabin where they put water and perfumes and purple and fine linen. After a decent interval Dick came in blue velvet and smiles, and bowed like a courtier (so he says, but I think he flatters himself), and, "Sir," quoth he magnificently, "since the fortune of war hath made us shipmates, I beg that I may welcome to my table the most illustrious Dragut Reis."

After a moment Dragut laughed, and it was as if his fierce, handsome face was hidden behind a mask.

"So you have found one of my rascals to blab my name! I hope I may cut the dog's tongue out."

"Why be at the trouble?" Dick smiled. "To be sure I am glad to know you for what you are, that I may treat you as beseems. And for my part, I can't tell why you'd not tell."

Again Dragut laughed.

"If you were Dragut Reis, my friend, and a Christian's prisoner, you would not have him know his good fortune."

"There's no man alive need take shame to be taken by Captain Rymingtowne. But 'twixt such as we 'tis all in the turn of the luck. To-day I'm your host, Signor Dragut; to-morrow your guest maybe."

"I promise you entertainment," said Dragut, and his mouth set hard.

"Then enjoy mine. Not for long, I doubt. Barbarossa will pay any money to have you back again."

They were now at table in Dick's cabin. Dick spoke carelessly, bent over his carving. But he was well aware that Dragut stared, and thought before he spoke:

"If you think I matter to Barbarossa more than a dog you are mightily wrong." Dick looked up, smiling incredulous surprise as though he heard mock modesty. But he had not missed something of suspicion, something of hostility in the tone. He did not understand, but it was more important to pretend

that he had marked nothing. Dragut went on: "Why, what fancy makes you hope Barbarossa will ransom me?"

"God save us! All Christendom knows you his best lieutenant."

Dragut seemed more at ease. He laughed.

"If you knew Barbarossa, you would know that I or any other man alive am worth nothing to him. He needs none of us. We are as dust on his shoes."

Dick stared and began to look stupid—a sign, if Dragut had known him, that he was growing dangerous.

"Well now," he drawled. "To hear that! Dust on his shoes, quotha! There's what I would never let any man think of me."

"My good friend," Dragut sneered, "if ever you meet Barbarossa—as I much hope—he will teach you to endure many things."

"Well, well, maybe I could teach him a thing and a half," Dick drawled, and gave a fatuous laugh.

Dragut, as it seems, wrote him down a fool, and they did not make good company. Dragut maintained the sullen, ferocious temper natural to his situation. Dick was stupid and boastful. When they parted he felt confident that Dragut no longer imagined that he suspected anything. He paced the deck, giving his whole mind to discover what there was to suspect.

Dragut had been startled by Dick's assurance that Barbarossa would pay high for his ransom. Why? It was plainly to be expected. Every day prisoners were bought back to freedom by Christian and Moor, and so famous a captain as Dragut must be sought, whatever the price. Dragut wished Dick to believe that Barbarossa cared nothing for him. Why? All the world knew that he was the best of Barbarossa's lieutenants. Had he quarrelled with his master? Would he have to pay his own ransom? Or was there some deeper mystery? Why had he been sailing in a pleasure ship without guns or fighting-men? Because Barbarossa had cast him off? But he had been sailing with Barbarossa and a whole armada in escort. They had not quarrelled, then. He was still Barbarossa's man. There was some deeper mystery. Dick laughed to himself as he watched the captured ship plunging in the wake of the *Reckoning*. The pirates had given him an alluring puzzle to unravel, and it was likely that he had made a pestilent puzzle for them.

The wind rose again before nightfall, and after dark it grew stormy. The *Reckoning* made good enough weather of it, but

when dawn came, pale gold over a sea all black and grey, her prize was not to be seen. For some hours they beat about, seeking her in vain. Then over the horizon came the masts of a fleet—Barbarossa's armada. To linger was to be lost. The *Reckoning* set her course for Genoa again. But Dick glowered at the sea. It was too likely that his prize and his men had fallen to Barbarossa. The carrack, no very seaworthy craft at her best, and battered from the fight, might well have been disabled by the night's storm and left a helpless prey. He cursed himself for wasting men aboard her. But he had not thought that in such weather the galleys could keep together on a course. Perhaps there were better sea-boats than galleys in that fleet. It loomed large upon the horizon, a rare armada—another mystery indeed. But there was nothing to be done against it. He set all the sail he dared carry, and soon the Moorish masts dropped out of sight again.

At dinner Dragut met him with a sneer.

"So you have not taken much by your pains, Sir Christian."

Dick scratched his head and gave him a silly guffaw.

"I have taken you, at the least. D'ye know, I think I'll keep you." Which did not make Dragut more amiable.

They had no more adventures till the crowded houses of Genoa rose tier upon tier above them and they anchored inside the Molo Vecchio. Then Dick took order with Dragut Reis.

"By your leave, you'll keep your cabin till I hear of ransom for you."

Dragut scowled at him.

"Here's a cowardly caution. Should I grow wings and fly to Barbary?"

Dick grinned.

"Aw, you're a great man, to be sure, and who knows? So you'll please to keep your cabin."

And so to a cabin Dragut was kept, with a guard at the door day and night, and none of the prisoners was let ashore, and Dick waited.

He was, I suppose, impatient, though he does not confess to impatience in all his life. He desired anxiously to save his boatswain alive, and I believe that was his chief concern. He had no doubt that Barbarossa would count Dragut worth many boatswains. He waited for Barbarossa to move.

If he was feeling loyal and affectionate, you suppose that he might have moved himself. There were, indeed, ways of sending

a message to Algiers. He could make a shrewd guess which of the respectable merchants of Genoa was Barbarossa's agent. But if he seemed eager to get his boatswain, the boatswain would be all the harder to get. Also the market value of Dragut would fall. I do not believe Dick cared for that. But if he seemed eager, if he rushed to make terms, there was no chance of making Barbarossa show his hand, and betray something of the mystery of Dragut and the armada. For that he did care. He had resolved to get his finger into Barbarossa's mysterious pie. And so he waited.

He had a week to wait. It was one of the four times in his life which saw his steady nerves grow troublesome. At the end of a week, on a morning early, a boat came alongside, and in it, much becloaked, was the reverend form of Alessandro Montaldi. Dick inspected him through a port-hole, and grinned satisfaction.

"It is you, is it?" he said to himself. "And the devil of a time you ha' kept me waiting." So he let Signor Montaldi wait half an hour for him. Montaldi was the man he had guessed Barbarossa's agent.

Montaldi had repute in Genoa as heir to an old and honourable name. He had inherited little else. He was understood to do business, like his ancestors, with the East, but any who sought business with him found him evasive. Yet he contrived to live in state. He was everywhere honourably received. He was popular among the seamen and common folk. There was no scandal against him. Even in the permitted traffic of ransoming Moorish slaves, with which all the other Eastern merchants meddled at whiles, he was never concerned. But for all his high family and his good repute, the little company who, without ostentation, ruled trade and policy kept him out of their intimacy.

Dick had him brought below by men who, knowing no more than a word or two of anything but English, could answer no questions. They were told to leave him alone in Dick's cabin. When Dick came in silently he was sitting by Dick's papers. Dick smiled at him benignly. There was nothing in them that could serve him. But some of them were still quivering.

"I do hope you ha' not been dull," said Dick. "If I had known of your coming I would not ha' been busy."

Montaldi bowed—he was a grave, austere man—doubting not that Dick had many matters on hand.

"A sea captain's always busy," said Dick, and waited.

"And you have been prosperously of late," Montaldi smiled.

"Have I to be sure?" Dick's face grew stupid. "Then you know more than I."

"Why, sir, it's common talk you have a rich bevy of prisoners."

"Have you come to buy them?"

Montaldi laughed.

"By what I hear they're slaves that will sell."

"That's more than I hope. A crew of lubbers and renegades."

"A renegade may fetch his price."

"Come, I ha' no time for talk. Do you bid for 'em?"

"What! without seeing them? My good sir, how can I tell what they're worth?"

"Then you may go back to shore again. I have no time for haggling. I sail to-night."

Montaldi betrayed some agitation.

"Why, then, you drive a hard bargain. I bid you fifty ducats a head for all you have."

It was a good price for slaves—too good for slaves a man had not seen.

"And what might you be wanting with slaves?" said Dick.

"You ha' no galleys that ever I heard."

"I do not buy for myself. But what is that to you if the ducats are good?"

Dick grinned.

"Why, my lad, I doubt your ducats come from Barbary. Out with it! I know why you are here."

Montaldi cried out:

"What do you mean? You think I have a commission to ransom them?"

"Ay, I think that and more. Now, what do you bid? Remember I sail to-night."

"Let me see them first."

"Not a man. And I sail to-night."

Montaldi protested nervously. It was idle to think of doing business so. He could swear that Dick would never make so much of them from any other man. The whole affair was in his hands.

"No doubt of that, my lad. I know you are Barbarossa's man."

Montaldi was frightened. After a moment he began to talk on a high note about folly and insolence and his noble family.

"I ha' no time," Dick cried out. "If you come here from Barbarossa, you can stay; if not, get over the side."

"You talk so wildly," Montaldi protested. "It is but a matter of buying them back—an everyday matter."

"'Tis not every day Barbarossa buys back Dragut Reis. What do you bid?"

Montaldi gasped a little. It was plain that he had hoped Dick would not know his prisoner.

"If you have Dragut Reis—if he is unhurt—my friends would pay a thousand ducats."

Dick laughed.

"Well, well, there is plenty of time. Barbarossa will go higher than that in a month or two."

"A month or two!" Montaldi echoed, and Dick saw that time was matter of importance. He was getting near the mystery.

"Ay, you can come and bid again when I am back from my cruise at the end of the summer."

"No, no!" Montaldi gave a nervous laugh. "Let us have done now. Come, I can pay you two thousand to have him free at once."

"Barbarossa's in a mighty hurry for him," Dick said. "Nay, my lad, I'll take my time. Barbarossa has some men of mine; had you heard of it?" Montaldi shook his head. "Well, they are no great account, but I'll not let Dragut go till I have them safe again."

"I never heard of your men," Montaldi cried petulantly.

"Well, wait till you do."

"But I tell you Dragut must be free at once."

Dick whistled.

"It takes two to put must to that, my lad. And I want my men first."

"And I tell you we know nothing of your men."

"Do you not now?"

Dick grinned cunning incredulity to annoy Montaldi. But he was not the least incredulous. If the captured ship had fallen again to Barbarossa, it was inconceivable that Montaldi should not have heard of it; inconceivable that Barbarossa should not think of its crew as worth something in a bargain for Dragut. They might have been killed perhaps. Or perhaps the battered carrack had been sunk in storm or fight. It was plain that Montaldi knew nothing.

He chattered nervously again.

"There are ten thousand slaves and more in the galleys at Algiers. Maybe there is a man of yours among them. How can

I tell? How can I find them? But Dragut Reis is no common seaman. You cannot think to keep him captive. You——”

“I think you be no judge what I can think,” Dick chuckled. “If you’re in so vast a hurry, send me to Barbarossa. Let me find my men out of his bagnios and bring them safe away, and he may have Dragut for two thousand ducats.”

“You—you would go to Barbarossa—to Algiers?” Montaldi stared.

Dick grinned.

“D’ye think I’ll be safe enough while my fellows have Dragut here? If he be worth two thousand ducats, he is worth a ducat and a half more than me alive or dead.”

Montaldi’s mind was overwhelmed. Feebly he began again at the beginning, and repeated himself at length. They came back to the same conclusion. Dick would agree to nothing but that he should go to Algiers and bargain with Barbarossa himself. Montaldi was annoyed with him—visibly suspected him of some secret purpose, the hope of some secret profit, and tried all weapons, from menace to mockery, to prevent him.

His horror, his alarm, were to Dick’s mind excessive. For a man to go among the Moors on some business of ransom was no miracle. Why should Montaldi make such trouble about it? He was certainly in a rare hurry to have Dragut free, and for Dick to go to Algiers must mean delay. But there seemed to be something else that irked him. He suspected Dick of something. For some reason he wanted to keep Dick away from Algiers. Dick was the more resolute to go. Montaldi yielded with a bad grace. He did not dare to refuse the only way to Dragut’s freedom, but could not conceal that he feared it.

Montaldi protested that he could give no safe conduct—that Barbarossa was more likely to have Dick cut asunder than bargain with him; and Dick answered that unless he came safe back from Algiers Dragut Reis would never see Algiers again. Montaldi declared that he knew no way of getting passage to Algiers, and Dick grinned and advised him to find one.

CHAPTER XXII

BARBAROSSA

WITH prisoners always to be bought and sold, there was a steady clandestine traffic between Genoa and Algiers. Montaldi knew that, of course, and knew that Dick knew it. His hesitations and his protests only lasted long enough for him to think the business over and confer with somebody else. He went ashore grumbling and whining of impossibilities, and that night Dick had a letter from him promising to do the impossible. In the morning Dick was put aboard a felucca, which called itself a fishing-boat, and owned a crew whose race was a mystery. It sighted more than one galley which let it pass unchallenged, and it brought Dick safe into the harbour of Algiers. The crew, who had been surly, became truculent then. They landed him, guarded as if he had been a prisoner, and marched him like a prisoner past the forts and the bagnios and through the narrow white streets to the castle on the hillside where Barbarossa held his court. There were half a score of them armed about him from the moment he landed till he was given over to a captain of Barbarossa's guard. But for all their care and their haste he had seen that the harbour was full of galleys, the town of soldiery. It was confirmed that Barbarossa had some great scheme in hand.

His letter of credence was taken from him, he was led to a guard-room and searched for weapons. Then:

"You be feeling timid, seemly," he grinned.

"The last Christian who came on an errand to Barbarossa we flung to the hooks," quoth the captain.

"Why, did he dare laugh at you?"

"Wait your turn," said the captain carelessly.

There was not long to wait. With two men on either side, and two behind, he was led across a garden, rich but unkempt, down a marble arcade elaborate and half-built, and into the presence of Barbarossa.

Kheyr-ed-Din Barbarossa had been a fine figure of a man, but he was shrunken and enfeebled. He lounged upon a heap of cushions, all in white from turban to shoe. A lean hand fretted at his girdle. The beard that hid most of his face was red no more, but tawny-grey and white. His right hand moved about his mouth in the manner of weakening age.

Dick nodded at him cheerily:

"God bless you! How's all with you?"

Barbarossa stared; the fidgety hands fell still. He was like an animal waiting to spring. He flung an order at Dick's guards, and they fell back and away. The huge negro at Barbarossa's side, all but naked, with scimitar unsheathed in his hand, stayed where he stood. Barbarossa beckoned Dick nearer.

"What do you want of me—Christian?" he said in a cold, sneering voice.

Dick shrugged.

"Naught to keep you awake o' nights."

"If you palter with me I will have you cast upon the hooks."

There was no sound but the laughter of a fountain and the negro's heavy breathing.

Dick made a gesture of impatience.

"Oh, you talk like an old woman frightening children."

The old man quivered a little.

"Would you yelp at me, dog?" he muttered.

Dick began to laugh. He had never, I take it, much appetite for the terrific; and this old man was too absurdly like an angry cat.

The old man stammered something. His eyes were dim and bloodshot. He made signs in the air. The negro started forward, heaving up his scimitar. Dick sprang on him. For a while they swayed together, straining, stamping, panting. Barbarossa cried out, and the negro let his scimitar fall and hurled himself free. Dick put a foot on the scimitar and stood dishevelled and panting.

"That was not ill-done," said Barbarossa quietly. "You are English, they say?" Dick nodded. "They are strong cattle, the English, but only cattle, for what I know. You are the captain of that square-rigged ship which hunts my galleys? She sails well. You fight her well. You have taken many of my galleys, I think?" Dick laughed. "One off Tangier last summer. That was the first. Two by Bizerta in the autumn. One was out of Tunis at sea, and one off Matapan. She was rich."

Dick laughed again.

"And a carrack on the high seas. She had Dragut."

Barbarossa showed no sign of anger.

"You have done well," he said quietly. "You may do far better." Something of a smile flashed for a moment in the fierce

eyes. "You are as good a Christian as the rest, Englishman? It would cost you nothing to spit on the cross?"

"What's your will?" said Dick lazily.

"If you were a captain of mine you could count your gains ten times over. Bring your ship, and I will give you another such and ten galleys under your flag, and the half of all they win you. And if you be what I think you, I will make you such another as Dragut."

"We're not talking business," said Dick.

Barbarossa raised himself a little on the cushions.

"You mock at me, Englishman?" Dick nodded genially. "I tell you, you may be rich and powerful as one of your Christian kings."

"And live like a hog in a sty. I've a home in England."

Barbarossa laughed.

"Dog, what is home? I was born to a home in a seaman's cottage. Home is where you have power and pleasure."

"You're a poor heathen," said Dick.

Barbarossa looked over his shoulder. The negro flung himself upon Dick. Barbarossa cried out, and all the soldiers came running.

"Have him flogged," he said coldly.

"It don't help you to Dragut," Dick laughed as he was haled out.

If he had been a man of heroic pride, doubtless he would have made a desperate fight of it—chosen death rather than the ignominy of a beating. This does not seem to have occurred to him. He gave them, I infer, little trouble. He seems to have been surprised by the weakness of the men with the rods. Or he pretends so. But he speaks bitterly of the prison into which he was flung afterwards—a cell no bigger than a coffin, and of horrible feter. Perhaps you expect him to have been regretting that he was ever such a fool as to come to Algiers. I do not find that he ever confessed to this.

Some time in the next day—he had been left without food or drink—he was haled out and brought again to Barbarossa. It was the same scene. The old man lay still on his cushions as if he had not moved. He showed some grim amusement at Dick's dirt and disarray.

"Have you come to your senses, Englishman?"

"I have never lost them. Nor my temper neither."

Barbarossa waited a moment.

"The last messenger I flogged had his will of them that flogged him the day after." He paused. "The one before, I watched as he was sawn asunder." Dick said nothing. "I wonder which way you choose."

"I wonder how all this tomfooling is going to help you to Dragut."

"What do I care for Dragut?"

"To be sure, you know best," Dick laughed.

"Will you take service with me?"

"If I be not back in Genoa in two weeks Dragut is dead."

"If you will not take service with me, you will never see Genoa again. That is how much I care for Dragut."

Dick began to laugh.

"You fool, do you think my fellows are to kill him quietly? If I be not back they put him to torture."

Barbarossa stirred on his cushions.

"Torture?" he repeated, and Dick marked a change in his voice. "I also can use torture, Englishman."

"To be sure. And what can I tell if you do? But Dragut Reis could tell a deal about you. They would be glad to hear all your plans, the Genoese."

"You are a fool," said Barbarossa in a low voice.

Dick laughed.

"Did you think me such a fool as to come here without a sure hold on you?"

"What is your malice against me?"

"God bless you, none! I want naught but your ducats. Three thousand for Dragut and any men of mine you have in the bagnios."

"I have no man of yours. You are a fool." Dick stared at him. He was plainly honest enough. So the boatswain and his crew had not been taken. They were not in the game. "You are a fool," Barbarossa repeated. He seemed distressed as for a friend who would not hear reason. "Join with me and you may be great as any man I have. Who knows—you might be my heir. I have not seen a man in many years who—"

There was something so melancholy about him that Dick had to laugh again.

Barbarossa fell back on his cushions.

"Go your way, dog. We will hunt you down, my wolves and I. I promise myself your flaying."

"I thought you would bleed," said Dick with a grin.

"They shall pay you in Genoa," Barbarossa said, and Dick saw his broken yellow teeth. "They shall pay you in Genoa."

So that day the felucca sailed again. For once Dick seems to have been bewildered. The swift dismissal after all the queer delay startled him. The whole affair was fantastic, unreal, like a dream or a ballad. To Dick's cold, practical, northern mind the antics of Barbarossa were inhuman. For a little while, it seems, he began to fear that he was fighting against a creature incalculable. But it was not in him to be afraid long. He began to count up profit and loss. He had done his duty by the boatswain, Nick Antony. But Antony was lost after all. It was some consolation, doubtless, to have put a thousand ducats more on the price of Dragut. Yet I think that Dick was less pleased with himself than usual.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE GREAT RAID

THE felucca made a good run. Before sunset on the fifth day they saw the Alps again. By night they came into Genoa harbour, and Dick was set ashore. In the early morning he was rowed out to the *Reckoning*, and there, lying astern of her, he saw the captured carrack, and laughed and swore and laughed. The affair was mocking at him, designed by Providence to display him a fool. Doubtless he would shortly find Barbarossa's armada marshalled to go and catch tunnies. He swore considerably.

The boatswain was hailed and came aboard to breakfast. He did not seem to find himself surprising or ridiculous. He greeted Dick coldly and with some contempt.

"Well, I never thought to see you again. Going mare's-nesting among the heathen!"

"Nor I you, Nick."

The boatswain spat.

"More fool you!" quoth he. "And to go off to Algiers now! There's foolishness. To throw a young head after grey hairs. Oh, 'tis wicked!"

He was with some difficulty persuaded to tell his tale, which was very long and very technical, but may be here brief. The carrack had lost her foremast in the storm, could not keep her

course, had run before the wind, and hardly made Malta. There they found her in parlous case, and only after much labour patched her up to venture the voyage to Genoa.

His tale was hardly told before Montaldi was announced. He was transfigured. He revealed himself effusively genial. He spluttered congratulations and flattery. He was hardly to be diverted to business, and when he came to business was merely anxious to pay. There was to be no haggling, no difficulty. He heard that Barbarossa desired only to be of the best of friends with Dick. He had the three thousand ducats with him.

There was nothing for it but to finish the affair. The money was paid. Dragut was conducted with ceremony to the boat. Even he seemed to have imbibed some joviality. He went over the side with a bow and a laugh, and "To our next meeting."

Montaldi lingered with more smooth words. He hoped to do more good business with Dick. He hoped they might be friends. He coveted a better acquaintance. He begged that Dick would sup with him. And Dick agreed, and all smiles he departed.

"Why's there so much oil to him?" quoth the boatswain.

Dick chuckled.

"I'll tell you after supper."

All that day he was busy rummaging the carrack, but there he found nothing to interest or enlighten him. She had among her charts, which were scanty, a map of the Italian seaboard from Naples to Leghorn drawn in great detail. That surprised him a little, but he could not think it significant of anything. He went pensively to Montaldi's supper.

The one thing important about that was Montaldi's eagerness to make him come. Many explanations were possible. Montaldi might have orders from Barbarossa that persuasion and blandishment should be used to win him over. That was the least likely. Montaldi might have orders for kidnapping. That was possible. So Dick had a party of his men surround the house at a little distance. Montaldi might have orders for poison. That was most likely of all. Barbarossa was not likely to forego revenge, or, once he had Dragut safe, put it off. And it was an age which, for business and pleasure both, used poison freely.

Dick entered the too hospitable house with a languid air, and when Montaldi rushed upon him, apologized for ill-health,

feared to be bad company, but had not liked to break his promise. Montaldi was altogether correct; regretted, sympathized, thanked and applauded him for coming, and solicitous for his comfort. Dick was conducted into a little gorgeous room glittering with crystal and gold, fragrant of flowers and rare fruits. A servant bowed them to table and glided out. Then Dick sat down heavily and appeared to suffer.

"Give me leave," he groaned. "I doubt I can eat nothing. I was in the wrong to come."

Montaldi was properly startled; condoled, remonstrated, offered delicacies, and vaunted them innocent enough for a baby. But Dick would have nothing, not even wine, begged Montaldi not to talk of it, for the very thought was painful, but to go on with his own supper.

"In charity, let's talk of something not food," and with the nervous haste of a man ill at ease within Dick began to talk of Barbarossa.

It was at this point that Montaldi's behaviour began to be strange. He might well have packed Dick off to his ship; he might have complained of his coming in such a state; he might have been angry at such disgust for his fare. But it was not natural that he should sit down to eat, and eat nervously, and drink deep, and in the midst of uneasy answers still press wine on his unpleasant guest. After a while he sprang up.

"I have it! Ah, fool that I was not to think of it before! I have a wine from Vesuvius—a very nectar, a cordial of the rarest." He bustled to the sideboard. There were, you remember, no servants in the room.

Dick protested feebly, languidly. But Montaldi, busy with the wine and glasses, chattered on. He was busy a long time. He came back with one glass brimming, and pressed it into Dick's hand.

"Nay, I will not be denied. I protest, it is the very elixir of life. Drink it off, my friend, and you will be your own man again. As hungry as I. Come pledge me!"

Dick took the glass, laughing weakly.

"Well, do me reason," he said.

"With good will," cried Montaldi, and sent back for the bottle and filled another glass.

Dick rose unsteadily to his feet and lurched forward. Then his hand fell on Montaldi's shoulder. He put his glass down on the window-sill.

"Change glasses," he said sharply.

Montaldi trembled under his hand. Montaldi's face was white, and he stammered something.

Dick thrust him away and pushed the window open, and shouted to his men waiting outside:

"Call the watch!"

"You are mad!" Montaldi cried, and his teeth chattered.

Dick laughed and shifted his chair, and sat down in front of his glass and the window.

"You have tried to poison me, my lad, and the watch is coming. I shall give them that glass of poisoned wine and tell them that you gave it me because you are hired by the King of Algiers and a traitor to Genoa. Or else—or else you will tell me for what Barbarossa means his armament, and give me all his letters to you this last two months."

"It is a lie," Montaldi stammered.

"Then drink off the wine," Dick laughed. Montaldi shrank away.

"So. Then you can tell the watch and tell the Council—they love you, do they not?—who bade you poison me."

Montaldi rushed at him madly, was easily caught, and flung down on the floor. Outside in the street was the tramp of a march. Montaldi staggered to his feet.

"I will tell you—I will tell you," he cried. "But you will say nothing! Swear that you will say nothing to any man!"

"The truth and the letters," Dick grinned. And he leaned back to the window and cried to his men: "Hold them in talk!"

"I will tell you," Montaldi gasped. "It is Julia Gonzaga."

"The letters," Dick said, and Montaldi rushed out. He came back panting with a few papers, and Dick turned them over and saw enough. He stood up laughing. "And so good-night and pleasant dreams."

Montaldi clung to his arm.

"Swear you will never let Barbarossa know of this."

"Not I," Dick laughed. "You are too useful, my friend," and out he went, and with some ducats easily persuaded the watch his men had mistaken him when he merely bade them to be on the look-out for him.

All the mystery was plain enough at last, plain as you may read it in solemn historical prose. Julia Gonzago, the widowed Duchess of Trajetto, was famed to half the world as the most.

beautiful woman in it. "Wherever her feet may tread," so they put it coldly in her own time, "whatever her eyes may behold, she yields to none other in loveliness, but as though she descended from heaven is proclaimed with rapture a goddess." Kheyr-ed-Din Barbarossa desired to commend himself to the Sultan Soliman, who had just made him Admiral, by capturing her for the Sultan's harem—a delectable conquest, a magnificent insult to all Christendom. For her the carrack had been destined. For the raid to capture her Dragut Reis, Barbarossa's best captain, was needed. For her the armada was gathered.

She made her home at Fundi, near the coast of Gaeta. The plan of the raid was clear in the letters to Montaldi, but without the letters Dick could have guessed it once he knew the object. The armada would pounce upon Gaeta and seize harbour and town. The two thousand men, with Dragut to lead, were to march on the castle of Fundi.

Before dawn the *Reckoning* had put to sea. Dick counted that he had more than time enough to reach Gaeta and warn the Duchess of her danger, and let her call the countryside to arms or fly. He was wrong. The winds were contrary. They served Barbarossa. And Barbarossa had lost no time. His armada had waited Dragut off Naples. As the *Reckoning* steered in towards the low coast of the Pontine Marshes her look-out saw a fleet on the horizon. Dick cursed all earth and heaven. There were, I suppose, not many things in his life which he desired so much as triumph over Barbarossa. That flogging rankled more than he admits.

He had something to fear. The pirate fleet might snap him up if he did not turn and run. He had little to hope. The pirates were already close upon Gaeta, already anchoring by Sperlonga, and it was idle to think that they might be beaten off. He swore, it seems, like a madman, but his head was clear enough and his will resolute. The armada was not likely to concern itself with one lonely ship. There was still a chance that he might get to Fundi first. He altered course for the little harbour of Terracina. Then the wind failed.

Just at dark a boat of wearied men landed him on the strand to south of Terracina, and he bought a horse at an inn and was shown his track and galloped by woodland and tilth through the grey first of the night. He found the servants at Fundi out watching firelight in the sky to southward. They ran upon this wild sudden horseman with delight and a patter of questions.

They had heard cannon at sunset. Now the horizon was red. What news could be had of these joyous wonders?

With a word of the truth he set them shrieking, and like sheep they ran. It was beyond him to stop them, to wring anything useful out of them. They were in panic, and, poor souls, since nine in ten of them were women, they had good cause enough.

With the rout, Dick rushed into the palace and for a while, raging, could find none who would tell him of the Duchess. Each of the frantic household thought only of flight or could not think at all. They broke from him or fought with him when he tried to stay them, and at last he gave them up and stormed through the dark galleries alone, roaring her name and varied oaths and her name.

A woman ran upon him. He gripped at naked neck or shoulder, and rated her and shook her and cursed her because she had not brought her mistress, because she did not rush instantly and fetch her mistress: and she gasped out that she was the Duchess's self. Without a word more he haled her along to the stair head where candles burnt and guttered, and by their light he looked her over.

There was no more than a night-gown of white silk about her. She was so finely fashioned that she must needs be the loveliest woman, why, the only woman in the world. And in her fear (so the man writes) she had the more grace.

"Ay, ye're worth a day's work," he chuckled. "So you be Madame Julia?" He knew well enough. There was the famed high forehead of alabaster, the dark eyebrows, the torrent of golden curls.

"The Blessed Virgin help me!" she moaned.

"Humph. There's little of her in my doublet," quoth Dick, and flung Madame Julia over his shoulder and ran on down the stair.

In the next corridor he set her down, and finding some medley of silks and tapestries on the floor wrapped her up in a bundle from which only the top of her head appeared. "You'll be cold enough before you're in a Christian bed again," he said, and broke a window with his shoulder and swung her out of it to the courtyard. There he fought three men for a mule, and won and tied her across the beast with strips of an abandoned petticoat, and so broke away with his booty. The press of panic made for the wooded slopes of Monte Passignano. Dick struck across the lowland for the sea. He heard the roar of the Moorish

onset. He saw the flames of the palace stream out against the sky.

As dawn broke over the strand by Terracina a shivering, sobbing woman was tossed into a boat. When she said anything that was articulate and not a prayer, it was to promise impossible wealth if only they would let her go. Thirty hours after, as the *Reckoning* ran northward through the sunshine, a woman piquantly beautiful in doublet and hose laughed the story down the wind.

"And I was to be the Grand Turk's chief wife! Ah, signor, never, never may I forgive you."

"Ay, you're a mettlesome piece!" Dick regarded her with grim amusement. "Or you think you be. But I wonder."

"I wonder!" she echoed and sighed and smiled. "And you, my knight errant, my deliverer, what called you to put your breast as a shield for my poor honour?"

"To be sure, it should have been your pretty, pale face," Dick grinned at her. "Then they could make a sweet ballad of you and me."

"You are a wild fairy-tale fellow," she said with a glance half mocking, half invitation.

"God bless you, not I," said Dick heartily. "Truth it is 'twas not your white and red brought me but old Barbarossa's shaggy jowl. I owed him a thrust in the short ribs."

After that the Lady Julia was less free with him. But she took pains to have him paid for her lavishly, which was doubtless what he had wished to secure.

When Dick came back to Genoa from the next cruise he heard that the Signor Montaldi had been stabbed in the streets. And none knew the murderer.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE GIRL IN THE BOAT

It was a night of spring. Violet sea and a violet sky made up the world. The stars glowed mellow and near. The south wind was a wild harmony of speed and force and genial heat. Captain Rymingtonne, who had in himself enough of these things, nevertheless opened his mouth to it, and his shoulders went back and his expansive chest dilated, and he loosed his

doublet at the neck, and it seemed to him that the lanterns of his ship burnt with a flame of ruddy gold. Down in the waist his crew was noisy in a glee:

For my pastime, upon a day,
I walked alone right secretly
In a morning of lusty May;
Me to rejoice I did apply.
Cull to me the rushes green!

Captain Rymingtowne swore to himself tenderly. He also had music in his soul.

By good fortune there were men upon the *Reckoning* less in sympathy with the universe. One shouted from the forecastle in a hurry, and the gunner, whose watch it was, snapped an order, and the helm went over and the sails flapped, and the gunner—a dry man—said what he thought.

Captain Rymingtowne came lazily across to port and looked over the side. Sliding slowly past—for the *Reckoning* still had some way on her—close in the troubled, foaming water was a frail boat. Her lugsail was fluttering all aboard like a flag, and she staggered and reeled with no hand on her helm. A clear voice cried from her in Spanish. A woman's shape stood in her, swaying. Captain Rymingtowne saw a white face.

"Right under our bows, look you," said the gunner with a recondite oath. "That's like a woman. That's life, that is. Then she quits the tiller, being feared of her foolishness which is bigger foolishness, and so more like a woman. And then, what's most like a woman, she curses we."

"She is praying us take her aboard," said Captain Rymingtowne.

"'Tis the same thing, do you see," said the gunner.

"Call a boat away," said Captain Rymingtowne.

"God help you!" said the gunner, and shouted.

The vagabond boat had drifted astern. The woman was still to be seen erect, stretching out suppliant hands. Her voice came passionate, but still comely. Whistles and the scurry of feet and the shriek of tackle quenched the music on the *Reckoning*, and in a moment a boat shot out from her side. As it came to her the woman flung herself into it. Neither companion nor cargo followed her, and her boat was left drifting. Soon the davits shrieked again, and the *Reckoning* began to go through the water, and another glee rang out.

Captain Rymingtowne lounged across the poop to welcome his guest. She came up the stairway from the waist leaning on a seaman's arm, and laughed as she came. Captain Rymingtowne waited for her to come into the lantern light. She was then seen to be tall and of a rich form. A shawl was over her head, and in its shadow her face might have been young or old. Her dress was of some dark stuff and simple, neither rich nor poor. The hand that gathered the shawl on her bosom was white and innocent of work.

"Give you joy of your salvation," said Captain Rymingtowne in Spanish.

"You are no Spaniard," she said, and her voice was young.

"Give me joy of that."

"It is your misfortune," she laughed. "But certainly not mine. What are you?"

"Your owner, thank you. And what are you worth in Spain?"

She hesitated, and then cried out:

"Nothing, nothing," and laughed with a girl's bitterness.

"But out of Spain I can be a woman."

"Out of the frying-pan," quoth Captain Rymingtowne, "into the fire."

"And you—what are you?"

"A man, my girl; which is mighty bad for you. And English; which is no good to you."

"English?" she repeated with some awe or doubt. After a moment she seemed to receive new light, and thanked the Virgin, and said plaintively: "You will save me? I have fled from Spain to escape the Holy Inquisition."

Captain Rymingtowne whistled. It was a big affair to take sides against the Holy Office. He would be counted an enemy in all the ports of Spain. And he was not ready.

"I never had a liking for martyrs," said he. "And you—you'll not make much at the trade, my girl. What set you playing with religions?"

"Oh—oh, all the priests hate me," she said nervously. "It is not my fault. Oh, give me help! I am all alone, and I am so weary, and—and I am hurt. See!"

She held out most miserably a delicate hand. Chafing of rope or timber had broken half an inch of skin on the palm.

"God save you, there's a wound indeed!" said Captain Rymingtowne. "You're a fine lass to go a-sailing."

"I can sail a boat as well as you," she cried. "I have been often."

"With your husband?"

"I have no husband." She stamped her foot.

"The better for him," quoth Captain Rymingtowne. "Is there any miserable man which you belonged to?"

"I am an orphan," she cried. Then added in a breath, "And my name is Teresa Galindo, and I have nothing in the world, and oh—and I ache everywhere. I hate you. Let me rest—let me rest." She dropped gracefully.

"I doubt if you are good for aught else," said Captain Rymingtowne, and waved her off and ordered a cabin for her, and turned on his heel.

I do not suppose she troubled his dreams. She was a handsome creature, and by such he was as amused as the rest of men. He judged her also silly and vaporous, and for such he had no taste. In the minute between lying down and sleep he had resolved to put her ashore at Tarragona and let the Holy Office fight it out with her. He foresaw no tragedy.

He was waked by the sound of firing. He came on deck in a cloak before the end of a minute. It was a little after dawn. The low coast of Spain loomed dim, and beyond it the mountain peaks were golden against the sun. Between the *Reckoning* and the land a high-charged ship was plunging under full sail.

"Fired across our bows, he did," the boatswain grumbled resentful amazement.

"Well, be civil. Fire across his," said Dick, and stared while the cloak slapped at his bare legs. The stranger flew the yellow flag of Spain. A puff of smoke came from his main deck, again the roar of a gun, and the ball plunged into the waves a few fathoms ahead of the *Reckoning*. Dick swore encouragement at the captain of his carronade, and turned away fighting the impertinences of his cloak. The gun was fired, and as the spray rose from the ricochet it was plain that the Spaniard's bow had narrowly escaped. His indignant surprise was revealed in the agitation of his crew, who appeared to struggle with diverse orders.

Captain Rymingtowne slid below for his breeches. He was, I conceive, annoyed.

A laughing face peeped at him from behind a door.

"What is it? Are you fighting?" Teresa cried gaily.

Dick Rymingtowne said something rude.

He was quickly dressed and on deck again. But there had been no more firing, and the boatswain rolled up to him with:

"They'm making signals. Wishful to speak."

"Well, I've a mind to say things," said Dick as they backed the mainsail.

It became apparent that the Spaniard expected them to send a boat humbly for his commands. Then Dick ran down and hailed him with brief profanity, desiring him to come aboard swiftly or go whither he was bound—a place of ill repute on earth. Whereat the Spaniard laboriously lowered a great barge of a boat. A long and splendid man in a cuirass descended into her solemnly. Slowly and unhandily she was brought alongside the *Reckoning*, which flung her ropes and a rope ladder. The splendid person in the cuirass, whose own ship had let down a gangway for him, shouted protest at this ignoble provision, and was again answered briefly. Then he sent two of his crew up the ladder, who held the top of it, while clumsily and perilously he followed. He was red and panting when he arrived. His dark beard bristled rage. He had tar on his gloves and his green velvet trunk hose, and he tried to brush it off, and swore.

Captain Rymingtowne lounged up to him unamiably, and grunted:

"You'll need tallow to that."

The Spaniard took a pace back and seemed to lose his breath, and cried out:

"Your name, fellow?"

"And who the fiend are you?" said Captain Rymingtowne.

"I am Don Alonzo Girono, and I command His Most Catholic Majesty's ship the *Santa Maria Magdalena*. You have fired on her, sir. You fired on the flag of Spain."

"Well, you asked for it. And I am a polite man. But you would not understand that. I am Captain Richard Rymingtowne, and that—that's the Queen of England's flag."

"I signalled you to heave to, sir."

"God bless your impudence."

"I'll have you answer for this language!"

"Oh, I am good at an answer, my lad!"

"I tell you, I desire to know your business on this coast."

Dick swore at him.

"You signal me to heave to! You fire across my bows! You desire to know my business! Now confound your eyes again! You are no better than a Barbary pirate!"

The Spaniard was plainly at a loss.

"Insolence shall not serve you, sir," he stammered. "Be sure I shall find a way to make you speak. I desire to know your business."

Dick laughed at him.

"I desire to know if you have seized any craft, any subject of the King of Spain."

"Oh, go away and burst!" said Captain Rymingtowne.

"D'ye take me for a pirate like yourself?"

There was such honesty in his irritation that the Spaniard frowned, bewilderment struggling in him with rage.

"Answer me, sir. Did you sight any boat out of Valencia last night? Did you see any, I say?"

"God help you, I think you are seeing bogies," said Captain Rymingtowne. "But this is no madhouse. Get over the side."

"Do you deny it, sir?" the Spaniard cried.

Captain Rymingtowne turned on his heel.

"He'll not go without his tallow, Nick," he said in English.

"Give him a lump and his riddance, i' God's name."

"I warn you you shall answer for this, sir," the Spaniard cried after him.

Captain Rymingtowne lounged away.

The Spaniard hesitated, threatened again, took a step after him, and thought better of it. As he approached the side, one of the ship's boys thrust upon his tarry gloves a shapeless piece of tallow. He flung it down, he swore shrilly, and so vanished.

His boat was hardly cast off before the *Reckoning* began to move, and sailed away on her old course. Don Alonzo was plainly annoyed. Before he came near his ship he was vociferating orders. He went up her side in a hurry, and on deck and aloft there was great business. The *Santa Maria Magdalena* stood after the *Reckoning* under a press of sail. And Dick went down to breakfast.

It is probable that you think him very rash all on a sudden. To make a quarrel with Spain and her navy about nothing is quite unlike him. You cannot suppose that he would risk a penny for the beautiful eyes of Teresa. Why did he not give her up and have done with her? I suppose he would not have thought of anything else if Don Alonzo had not made a fool of himself. But the folly of Don Alonzo was what no foreign sea captain would have endured, and especially that least humble

of sea captains, Dick Rymingtowne. Moreover, it could not, even in that turbulent age, be upheld. The haughtiest admiral of Spain must judge the Spaniard wrong. Therefore Dick gave his natural insolence its head.

But, of course, it was not master of him. In cursing and jeering at Don Alonzo he was well aware that there must be some reason in that man. The very wildness of his folly proved that it must be some potent cause which agitated him. A Spanish captain would not come firing on a blameless ship and rant about missing craft and Spanish subjects to its captain unless something of importance had been lost. Was it possible that the silly vaporous Teresa had importance? If so, she was worth keeping. Dick felt a great appetite for breakfast.

CHAPTER XXV

THE ETIQUETTE OF THE PROFESSION

By the table, unbidden, sat Teresa. She laughed; she started up and made him a curtsy which amazed him.

"My homage, sir captain," she said. "You are the mightiest liar ever I saw."

"Was there no glass in your cabin?" Dick drawled.

No amusement appeared in his heavy face. He was reflecting that she had no business to be at his table, that she had no business to overhear his skirmish with Don Alonzo, no business to joke about it—unless she were something different from the silly, feckless creature of last night.

To be sure, she was something different. Her tall, full form had a quick life in it that startled his well-controlled pulses. There was a mocking combatant light in her eyes. She was vivid and challenging.

"What surprised me was to hear you so brave," she said demurely.

Dick waved her to a chair.

"The men are cowards where you come from," said he. "For instance, you have no husband."

"Does any one tell the truth on your ship?" she murmured.

Dick poured her out wine and cut her salt beef.

"You'll have time enough to find out."

"You will keep me?" she cried eagerly. "Perhaps you will be that husband I so much desire."

"What is your dower?" said Captain Rymingtowne.

She tapped her bosom and made a little bow across the table.

"Myself is my fortune, my lord."

"I'll take care 'tis not my misfortune, my dear."

She laughed.

"You shine, sir; but you do not gain by it, I think."

"Did any man ever gain by you?" Dick drawled, but his eyes were keen. "I'll live and you'll learn, my girl."

"What would you give to know all about me?" she cried.

"I do, God bless you." Dick shrugged.

"You are wise, sir."

"I know you are a woman who knows she is pretty; that's one who'll tell me the rest of herself for the asking."

She made him a grimace:

"You rate me low."

"Why not?" quoth Captain Rymingtowne.

"Then, why not give me up to Don Alonzo?" she cried. "Oh, if I am but a popinjay, why should you keep me, sir?"

"He made no bid."

"Bid?"

"Why, you will fetch a price yet." He looked her over critically. "To be sure you be too fat for my liking. But some poor fool must want you sore, or why would Alonzo come banging after you to tar himself?"

"You are base, and an animal?" she cried.

Captain Rymingtowne laughed at her red face, and left her and went on deck to see how Don Alonzo's ship was doing. He did not come down again.

The *Santa Maria Magdalena*, carrying more sail than was good for her, had drawn a little ahead of the *Reckoning*. Captain Rymingtowne had no objection to that. But she was making signals and beating up to meet her came half a dozen bigger ships. They, too, bore the golden flag of Spain. To that Captain Rymingtowne objected much; he whistled and—

"Go turn the key on madame," said he.

But he did nothing else. He did not alter his course one point. He did not set an inch more sail. In the wake of the *Santa Maria Magdalena* he came down upon the Spanish fleet. The Don Alonzo's signals were proclaiming his wrongs and urging revenge Dick had no sort of doubt. But you will not suspect him of the

intention to fight seven ships of war. He behaved as if he had nothing to fear, because conscious virtue was plainly the safest part to play. You may think him not well fitted for it, but he was versatile. At least the spectacle of the *Reckoning* running on with the confidence of a blameless past into the midst of the Spanish fleet must needs be impressive to its admiral.

The abundant signals from Don Alonzo were abundantly answered from the flagship. As soon as they were near enough the *Santa Maria Magdalena* shortened sail and lowered a boat, and Don Alonzo was seen climbing the flagship's side. By that time, of course, the *Reckoning*, holding her honest way, was almost in the middle of the fleet. But there was no firing now. The Spanish admiral signalled with proper decorum that he wished to speak. The *Reckoning* decorously backed her mainsail. The Spaniard hailed to announce that he would send a boat. The *Reckoning* lay to. The boat came, and an officer from its stern requested that the English captain would come aboard the ship of the Admiral Don Luis de Vasquez. Dick sent for his gloves and his blue velvet cloak, and in them went over the side.

The officer of the boat received him with austere courtesy. The like awaited him aboard the flagship. He was conducted to the admiral's cabin. Don Luis de Vasquez sat in state with Don Alonzo and another of his captains, but he and the cabin surprised Dick by their simplicity. Don Luis left velvet and silk and jewels to his captains; his cabin eschewed upholstery. He was a man of the middle size, sallow and grey, by far less imposing than the flamboyant Don Alonzo or the sturdy, bluff soldier on his other side. But his grave eyes looked infinite experience.

"You understand Spanish?" he said, after due bows, and Dick bowed again. "You are English and command an English ship?" Again Dick bowed. "I am told that you fired upon a ship of His Most Catholic Majesty."

"After she had fired twice at me. And with never a reason nor warning given."

"I cannot allow that you were justified," said Don Luis coldly.

"Was I to let him blaze away at me as he chose?"

"It would be convenient that regret should be owned for an unhappy mistake."

"Since the gentleman was mistaken, to be sure I regret that I mistook him," Dick said blandly.

Don Luis bowed.

"Permit me to assure you that my captain's duty was but to come to speech with you. And in no way to dishonour your flag."

"I salute his," quoth Captain Rymingtowne.

"Very well. But I am told, sir, that you answered my captain's questions with jeers and insolence."

"How was I to answer a man which came aboard my ship and called me pirate? I told him he was making a fool of himself. And with respect to your worship, I tell him so again."

Don Alonzo exclaimed, to be cut off by his admiral with a curt: "You have said enough, sir."

Then Dick was addressed with more geniality.

"I advise you to forget this affair, sir. I tell you frankly I have nothing against you. I desire your aid. The matter is this. A lady of birth, Donna Teresa de Fazardo, the daughter of the Governor of Valencia, went sailing yesterday in a pleasure boat, and had not since been seen. What I ask of you is whether she or her boat has been sighted by your mariners?"

Dick stared at him.

"God save you, what should I do with her?"

Don Luis made a gesture of impatience.

"I suspect you of nothing, sir! I——"

"I am Richard Rymingtowne of the *Reckoning*, and no pirate nor kidnapper. You may hear of me in Genoa, and my good name and——"

"I know your repute, sir, and have nothing against it. You have deserved well of Christendom." They exchanged bows. "It is but the chance that you had sighted Donna Teresa's boat?"

Dick shook his head.

"I know naught of her," he said stolidly.

"I regret to have delayed your voyage," said the admiral, and rose.

With elaborate courtesies Dick was conducted to the boat and back again to his ship. Yet I think he was not altogether at ease. Don Luis de Vasquez was one of the men whom he always mocked and uncomfortably admired.

I suspect that the grave dignity of Don Luis encouraged Dick to cheat him. If he had been something less lofty, something less royal, Dick might have been ready to tell him the truth. But I doubt it. There was plainly nothing to be gained by giving the girl up. There might be some profit in keeping her. As for any later trouble with Spain, Dick had entire capacity in his ability

to evade it. Also, whatever the truth of the odd business might be, he was on the girl's side. All his life long he liked youth, all inclined to support it against age. He did not believe Teresa was telling the truth. A viceroy's daughter would not be running away from the Inquisition. But she was certainly running away from the viceroy. Dick had no mind to send her back to him. And, finally, he liked sport.

The Spanish fleet beat back to southward, and the *Reckoning* laid her course for Marseilles. When Dick went down to dinner, he heard a thumping at the door of Teresa's cabin. He unlocked it, chuckling, and she came out with such enthusiasm that she fell upon his bosom.

"Fie, fie!" he said, "and me always a modest man!"

"How dare you shut me up?" she cried, thrusting him off violently.

Dick shook his head over her.

"Your poor father," said he. "Twenty years of you and more. Maybe thirty. To be sure, I wonder 'tis not he which ran away."

She drew back against the bulkhead and stared at him with a frown and a smile. It happened that the expression made her vivid face look its best, as her pose marked the stately beauty of her form.

"You have a rare skill to make me angry, sir," she said. "But I am gentle and will suffer you to give me dinner."

"The truth is," said Dick, "I am frightened of you. For you are a desperate young woman, and I be naught better than a poor, shy mariner."

"Indeed, you wrong us both sir." She sighed demurely. "I pray you, let us dine. After dinner you may think better of yourself, if not of me."

"'Tis that which I fear," Dick protested, but he suffered her to take his arm and lead him to his cabin.

There they were awaited by the breakfast-table fare—salt beef and hard biscuit and thin wine. "We live hard," Dick apologized. "'Tis good for the virtues and the teeth."

"I should have thought such dinners would have given you an ache in both."

Dick displayed apprehension.

"But then you are such a wild piece."

"Now why do you so miscall me?" she protested plaintively; "who am as meek"—her eyelids drooped—"as meek as a nun's lily."

"I put no faith in lilies." Dick shook his head. "They be too sweet-scented for my dizzy head."

"Dizzy!" she laughed. "'Tis as hard and as cold and as tough as your own beef."

"Cold, quotha!" Dick was reproachful. "Cold? Who—I? When you ha' so bewitched me that I go quarrelling with all the armadas o' Spain for to keep you by me."

She laughed merrily.

"Oh, brave! And do I please you so well? Would you make me your lady, my lord?"

Dick rubbed his big chin.

"Would you have me, Grimalkin?"

"Grimalkin?" The word puzzled her, of course. "I do not understand."

"'Tis as much as to say pussy-cat. For what am I but a mouse to you?"

She compressed her lips. She looked at him severely, yet with laughter in her eyes.

"If I am cat, it's no mouse you are, but the dog which worries me."

"Who would ha' thought it now?" Dick drawled. "And me feeling so frightened all the time."

"Were you ever frightened in your life, sir?"

"Ay; when I was sea-sick."

"And I made you feel the same?"

"Why, d'ye see, you keep me all of a jig, and when I look at you I never know whether I be on my head or my heels."

"Now did you ever feel so for any woman alive?"

Dick laughed.

"My dear, if I did, I would never tell her so."

For the first time they looked at each other with frank affection. She spoke first.

"Well, sir, you think much of yourself, and perhaps I think myself no less. Shall we call friends?"

"But what's a friend?" said Dick, with his hand to his chin.

"He tells the truth."

"I'll tell you the truth about you," Dick drawled; "you are a fool for your pains."

"Is that why you like me? For I profess 'tis why I like you."

"You should have been a man," said Dick.

"Pshaw!" she said; "that is what you think of every woman with as much wit as yourself."

"Do I so?" Dick grinned.

She clapped her hands.

"I knew it. There is a woman to whom you are bound. Now I am happy altogether."

For the third time Dick rubbed his chin.

"Now what do you want of the world and me?" he said slowly.

She hesitated a moment, looking at him and playing with her wine cup. Then:

"Life!" she cried—"life!"

"Humph!" Dick grunted. "To a woman life means a husband or two."

"Oh, dunce! A husband is what I run from," said she.

"I am learning," Dick agreed; "you told me first you was running from the Holy Inquisition; and the admiral, he says it was from your father; and you say now it was from a husband. Are there any more after you?"

She laughed.

"How much did the admiral tell you?"

"That you was the daughter of the Viceroy of Valencia, and you put to sea in a cock-boat for your pleasure, and was lost to poor father."

"Poor father!" She tossed her head. "Well, sir, that was all true. And as for the Holy Inquisition, that was not true at all. When I found you were an English heretic, I thought you would be more of a mind to save me from Spain and Spaniards if you thought me a heretic too." She laughed. "Now I know you, I know you would fight for me because I am not ill to look at. But how could I tell an Englishman would be a gentleman?"

"You, which thought all fools was Spanish!" Dick murmured.

"It was my father who drove me away. I protest he is a vile tyrant! I am nothing to him; I have been nothing to him all my life, nor I nor my brothers nor sisters. He has known naught of us, seen naught of us. We have been in watch and ward of his servants; drilled by duennas and tutors. And he—he is too grand to deign a word for us. He——"

"You'll be doing without mothers in Spain?"

"I never knew my mother," said Donna Teresa, and it was a moment before her wrath swept on. "And now that I am a woman, now my father gives me orders that I am to marry a boy whom I have never seen and at once, so please you, on Corpus Christi Day. Ay, though I may loathe the creature, even as he

stands at the altar! Then I told my father I would not; then I flung his words back at him. And he—I hate his narrow face!—he was not so much as angry. He said, ‘But it is arranged. You will marry Don Diego, Teresa. You are fortunate.’ And I went away, and I took my boat and I put out to sea.”

“To be sure,” Dick said, “it was a kindness to the gentleman. But what will I do with you?” It is to be feared that Donna Teresa made eyes at him, for he went on austerely: “And what did you think would befall you when you put to sea?”

She laughed at him.

“A great romance, so please you, and here it is.”

Dick rubbed his chin.

“Well, well; I count I’ll get a price for you from your father.”

She stared, then started up.

“You would betray me?”

“’Tis all you are good for.”

“I hate you! I hate you!”

Dick tapped on the table, and without looking at her he said:

“My dear, you had better.”

There was silence between them. When she spoke her voice was gentler.

“Take me to Genoa. I have a cousin married there, and there the women are free. I was going to Genoa.”

“You”—for once Dick was startled—“you were going to Genoa? God save you! You thought you could make Genoa in that cock-boat!”

“I know all about sailing,” she protested.

Dick considered her gravely.

“’Tis a miracle you are alive to-day,” he said. “My dear—’tis not much in my way indeed—but you have some matter for a prayer or so.”

With which he left her, and she may have been surprised.

I do not know that he was much surprised at himself. He was by many tests, as you have seen, a man of little chivalry. And yet he had his honour. You think of loyalty to the girl of the West country Downs which should doubtless have made him austere to Donna Teresa. If anything is sure about him, it is that he counted it the only use of his life to unite himself with Mary Rymingtowne. But he was not delicate. I do not think that loyalty would have stayed him from an hour’s game at love-making. I do not doubt that Donna Teresa excited him. Her rich beauty, her restless life, called to his abounding strength.

And all that summer's voyage to Marseilles, and on from Marseilles to Genoa, she had nothing from him but bluff, mocking jokes like a brother's and a brotherly respect. He had his honour. He was an English sea captain of the same blood and the same creed as Hawkins and Drake. He could use craft and violence to his enemies without shame. He played no tricks with the helpless. And under his flag, on board his ship virtue reigned. In his command there must be nothing unseemly.

So Donna Teresa aboard the *Reckoning* found herself as much a child as with her duenna. That she was grateful I have never been sure.

CHAPTER XXVI

DON DIEGO IS BLIND TO HIS BLESSINGS

THEY came to Genoa and moored, and were beset by a crowd of boats, and a crowd of pedlars swarmed aboard. The *Reckoning's* crew had always money to waste. The ship was tumultuous, and tumult was permitted. But as Dick came out of his cabin he found a shabby fellow in the alley way. That was against all order. The pedlars were always forbidden below. Dick said so with oaths and a blow, and the fellow, who had a pack, whined out that he wanted to sell laces to the lady. Dick drove him on deck and into his boat.

The affair was irritating. Teresa had been persuaded to keep her cabin till word of her was sent to her cousin. The world need not be advertised that she was aboard the *Reckoning*. What did the pedlar fellow know of her? There was no fear that he knew anything of importance. The crew of the *Reckoning*, tried in many a delicate business, blabbed no secrets. The pedlar might have caught up some joke about a woman aboard. It was inconceivable that he knew more, and so much could do no harm. Still, better if he had known nothing.

Dick went ashore with a letter from Teresa to her cousin, who was married to the heir of the Fieschi. Then he was again annoyed. The woman was gone with her family to Naples, and the servants talked of a month before she would be back. Dick dined at his favourite tavern in a morose temper. As he went back to his ship through the twilight a man tried to stab him.

It was in one of the narrow lanes close above the harbour. A fellow lurched against him and checked him, and another sprang

upon him from behind. Dick flung himself backwards against the wall, heard the spit of an oath, and felt the sear of steel along his neck as between him and the wall the man's body was crushed. Not very sure that he was alive, he hurled himself free, plucking at his sword. Then he was alone in the lane. The two who beset him—he hardly heard the patter of their feet—had scurried away into the warren of houses.

He felt his neck. There was no worse than a deep scratch in the side of it. He had come off well. Slowly and warily he made for the quay, and found his boat was rowed out. He went pensively to bed. The affair was not strange. For a ship captain, or any one else who might have a purse, to be done to death in the alleys of Genoa was nothing new. Yet he had never been assailed before, and the attack fell oddly with the coming of Teresa and the curious pedlar. He thought so for five minutes before he slept.

In the morning at breakfast he said nothing to Teresa of pedlar or dagger, but he told her that her cousin was away at Naples, and she laughed at him.

"Alack, poor soul, and you so longing to be rid of me! You will have spent the night in tears! Or curses was it? My poor gentleman! And shall we sail another voyage together then?"

"No, by your leave. That you are mad I know well enough. But I'll not have you drive me mad. I would not be like you, my girl, for ten thousand ducats."

"Indeed," Teresa gurgled, "you would be a woman of sharp corners," and she drew on the table a picture of Richard Rymingtowne's rectangular shape. At this point it was announced that a gentleman desired speech with Captain Rymingtowne, and he escaped. On the poop stood a slim fellow in black silk and velvet, with braid of gold, and a golden plume in his cap.

"I am Diego de Vasquez, sir," said he.

Captain Rymingtowne showed no intelligence. It was uncomfortably awkward that the gentleman whom Teresa should have married, and from whom Teresa had run, should be after her so soon. But there was no use in telling him so.

"Diego de Vasquez," Captain Rymingtowne repeated. "And who is he, if you please?"

"I am the nephew of Don Pedro de Fazardo, the Viceroy of Valencia, and I come seeking his daughter."

Dick gaped.

"What—on earth? I thought she was in heaven—being drowned, poor soul, in her innocence."

"She is in your ship, sir."

Dick patted his shoulder.

"My poor lad, you are light in the head. 'Tis a sad business to be sure, but—get you to an apothecary."

"Buffoonery will not serve, sir. She is on your ship. You are lying to me, as you lied to the admiral and to Don Alonzo. She is on your ship, and has been seen."

Captain Rymingtonne looked the lad up and down, and (so he declares) liked him well. He had, it seems, an eye and an air, and his little golden beard was dainty. But the affair grew serious.

"You call me liar," Dick drawled. "Boys will be calling names. Who is your friend who sees visions?"

Don Diego hesitated.

"A prying pedlar, maybe? Give you joy of your comrades, child. Was it you or he which would have stabbed me in the back?"

Don Diego flushed.

"You may be assured, sir, when I seek your death it shall not be stealthily. The rogue shall be punished."

"Ay, he failed," Dick sneered.

"I give you my word, sir, he had no charge from me but to discover the truth. The attack on you was his own infamy. For the which I have him in ward and will take order with him. It is I who am wronged, sir, not you, in that he sullied my service. You are answered."

"Here's a brave crow," Dick laughed.

"I am not here to change words with you. I require you yield me my cousin."

With a genial smile Dick considered him.

"Maybe 'tis your pretty beard—I begin to like you. Go back to Spain, dear lad, and thank God for all."

"Very well. It is very well." Don Diego grew pale and flushed again. "I carry my cause to the duke, who will not be laggard to avenge the honour of Spain."

Dick laughed.

"God save you, you are such a fool I could believe you honestly in love. And yet you have not seen her face! Away to the duke and cry, 'Here is a wench, my lord, which rather than marry me put out to sea in a cock-boat to drown. Prithee condemn her to my arms.' You will be the joy of all Spain."

Don Diego bit his lip.

"What do you know of her? You lie, I say!"

"Look where she comes," Dick shrugged. "Now God give you joy of each other!"

By the companion-way Donna Teresa stood stately and very still. Don Diego gave a cry and started to seize her. She held up her hand against him and glided forward with a royal grace. Captain Rymingtowne drew aside to leave them the field, but to him she came and took his hand. It appeared to him that she had never been so desirable, never so richly a woman.

"I have come from Spain to seek you, lady," Don Diego cried.

"Don Diego de Vasquez?" she said coldly, and he bowed with some embarrassment. "You come late, sir."

"I protest I——"

"It is late to protest. What do you want of me now?"

"Now? Want?" he stammered.

"Yes. Be pleased to remember I am no more a slave to be given at my father's will."

"I will bring you back in all honour to Spain."

"And to marriage with you? I cry you mercy, sir. Thanks to this gentleman, I am free of you. Are you answered?"

"This gentleman? What is he to you or you to him?"

"He has given me life."

"This is no answer."

"He saved me from drowning, which I had chosen rather than you. Are you answered now?"

"Are you his wife? Are you to be his wife?"

"And if I am?"

"An English heretic, a common seaman. By heaven, he has bewitched you!"

She began to laugh.

Don Diego made her a bow and turned away to Captain Rymingtowne.

"By your leave, sir, a word in your ear. Be pleased to walk apart." They drew to the gangway. "I am answered. But I think that you owe me something."

"I doubt I'll have to thank you for a scratched face," said Captain Rymingtowne in English, with a rueful glance over his shoulder. But in Spanish he answered: "At your will, lad."

"We must measure swords. I know not what your birth may be, but I waive that to meet you. Sir, I shall wait you an hour before sundown at the eastern gate."

Captain Rymingtowne looked at him with reflection.

"I would give something if I could deny you," he said.

With a swirl of skirts Teresa arrived between them.

"What is it? A challenge?" she cried. "Nay, that shall not be! You shall not, for my sake!" She turned to Captain Rymingtowne very comely in her beseeching.

"Ask your cousin," he shrugged.

She turned to Don Diego.

"You have no claim on me, I think," the lad said coldly.

"Yes! Yes! Why must it end in this? What wrong have I done? I was not pledged. You had no right in me. And I—I have done no shame. Cousin, cousin, I meant you no ill. I could not be given to you bound like a beast in the cart for market. What ill has he done you? He saved me when I was drowning. He has been to me all honour. And now you would kill him for it. Ah, it is cruel, cruel! It is not me but your pride that brought you seeking me. You have no love, you have nothing for me—nothing! But you would kill the man who dares save me. You are cruel, cruel, and as cold—as cold——"

"Cold!" the lad cried with something of a sob in his voice, and turned from her. She was poignantly beautiful. He spoke huskily, looking over the sea: "I promise you the gentleman shall be safe from me."

"Ah, you'll not meet him!"

He turned again with a stamp of his foot:

"Yes, by heaven, yes!" and then he laughed a little. "Oh, yes, we must meet, he and I."

For a moment she was bewildered; then with a strange, tender cry she flung her arms about his neck.

"You would let him kill you? Oh, cousin, cousin!" and she hid her face on his shoulder and laughed and sobbed.

Captain Rymingtowne smiled sideways.

"There's what it is not to know when you are well off, my lad. Take her back to Spain, and God help you!" said he.

CHAPTER XXVII

PASSENGERS

It is claimed by Captain Rymingtowne that his quarrel with the King of Spain was not of his seeking. I do not discover that

he made strong efforts to avoid it or to compose it, nor yet that he had any remorse for profiting by it. But in the papers which he left behind him at Assynton he paints himself a simple, honest fellow, who meditated ill to no creature in Christendom—till his genial innocence was molested. Then, he allows, he hit back according to his ability. His modest journal expresses surprise that the King of Spain should have made a noise about the business, and hints decorously that his Majesty was no gentleman. But I fear that Captain Rymingtowne had a sense of humour. You shall judge.

That he had no original purpose of falling out with Spain I believe easily. He found as much plunder as his large appetite needed in hunting the Barbary pirates, and he was essentially a man who knew when he had enough. Also he was one of those who would not choose to make enemies of those who could pursue him home.

Therefore I acquit Captain Rymingtowne of intending the quarrel. What is more, I think he might have tried to compose it if he had wanted to do more business in the Mediterranean. He was a very practical man. But he had his passions, and the quarrel came down upon him when he had made all he wanted out of the Moors—enough to keep house as a gentleman—when he was ready to go home to the lady of Assynton; and it annoyed him and he went into it vehemently. For, you suppose him thinking with oaths, if Spain sought to trap him when at last he was to possess the woman of his life, Spain should yield him jewels to hang on her neck, and a mocking triumph over all the power of Spain should be part of the laughter of their marriage.

The original cause of it all was a girl and her temper. If Teresa de Fazardo had never run away from her father in a cock-boat, it is certain that Captain Rymingtowne would never have picked her up. Then Don Alonzo Girono would never have come seeking her, never have found Captain Rymingtowne and what he called peevishly “insolence, contumely and lies.”

When Captain Rymingtowne sent the lady back to Spain with the gentleman paternally destined to marry her, he imagined the whole business happily over. But her father, who was a person of importance, and Don Alonzo Girono, who had important uncles, conceived that in making fools of them Captain Rymingtowne had outraged the majesty of Spain, and must be notably punished.

Captain Rymingtowne was in Genoa dealing with finance, of which he had as sure a mastery as of seamanship. The harvest of his cruises was stored in many places. There was money of his already in England with Gresham; there was more in Venice, and some in Nuremberg, and some as far as the Hansa towns. The lordly bank of St. George had most, and had to give account for all. There was still merchandise to sell, Eastern brocades and a treasure of perfumes. Altogether he counted himself worth ten thousand pounds. It was enough, and more than enough, to match his Berkshire girl's manor with another, and entertain her splendidly. I imagine him content, for, despite the masterful greed of that jaw, it is certain that he could be satisfied.

But he meant to make sure of every groat and to make the most of it, and so there were long conferences with the chiefs of the bank. When he was all but ready to sail, one of them introduced to him Annibale Gaddi, a banker of Florence, who, having business in England, wanted a passage thither, and would pay for it handsomely. Messer Annibale Gaddi was perfectly the Italian man of money, smooth and polished, so that any reality in him seemed to slip through the fingers, consummately courteous, and cold as ice. Dick Rymingtowne, who liked all kinds of men, found the type amusing, but if he had been bored by it would doubtless have given it passage at a price. He had been bred too poor to despise any gain of size. So one passenger went aboard the *Reckoning*.

Through the five years he had been in and out of Genoa harbour Dick Rymingtowne used the same tavern. Its fat and masterful mistress ranked as a friend. But since there was no need, he did not tell her that he was going back to England. All she knew, when she asked him if he would care to carry a man and wife across to Spain, was that he would soon be off on another cruise. Spanish ports were on the way to England, and it could be no great trouble to earn a few more ducats. That he and his ship might run into danger was not a possible suspicion. He had done Spain no wrong, and if he had, the matter of landing a pair of folk would but take him into harbour and out again before any one ashore had time to know who he was. He thought of the business as merely worth his while if the pair chose to make it worth his while.

So he let Don Miguel Perez come to speech with him, and Perez brought his wife. They were visibly both Spanish, though

her eyes were blue and her hair yellow, an arrangement very comely against the golden brown of her skin. She was piquantly shaped and gay. Perez, shorter as well as slighter than she, was a neat, brisk fellow, and they both had a vivacious freedom of speech which Captain Rymingtowne liked none the worse because it was sometimes a trifle coarse. He had, I fancy, a way of trusting folks more if they were not too virtuous.

Perez and his wife had come to Italy, as they said, after the inheritance of a cousin of hers. They wanted to go back to Alicante. That was too far out of Dick's way, and he told them so; but the price they offered was well enough, and if Cadiz would have served them, he could have spared them a cabin. Perez offered him another ten ducats to put in at Alicante. Captain Rymingtowne was not tempted. They seemed so much disappointed, the wife was so prettily cross, that he told them of a Genoese ship bound for Valencia, which might do their business.

"I thank you for nothing," said Perez fiercely. "I know that captain. I would not venture with him for a thousand ducats. An oily fellow. A knave of culture."

Dick shrugged.

"What d'ye look for in sea captains? Knaves we be all. 'Tis our living. And what d'ye fear of him? D'ye travel with this inheritance of yours?"

"Why, sir, there's enough in my wife's traps to buy a ship or two."

Dick shrugged.

"You are like the goose in the fairy tale that went calling 'Come and eat me.' D'ye think I ha' not the pluck to pluck you? God help you, would you have me more virtuous than a little Genoese?"

"Oh, sir, your fame is known," Perez laughed. "You only plunder the heathen. You are—not to offend you—of approved honesty. But to be plain with you, 'tis not my ducats that I feared for, but my wife." Whereat the wife looked coy, and made eyes at Dick. "Our friend Matteo is known for a pirate, a slave dealer, a merchant in human flesh. And with you we are safe."

"Now out on it, this is a worse insult than the other," Captain Rymingtowne grinned. "D'ye think I would not know how to get a price for the lady?"

"I count you a man of honour, sir," said Perez with a bow.

"I will be sworn no woman hath ever trusted you in vain," his wife smiled.

"Maybe I never found one who was fool enough to trust me."

"Then let me be the first," said the lady with a comely smile.

"God help you, you will come, I see," quoth Captain Rymingtowne. "Well, it's Cadiz or nowhere."

"You are a hard man, sir," the lady sighed.

"The better for you—and your husband," quoth Captain Rymingtowne.

"So be it," said Perez. "When do you sail?"

"Your baggage aboard to-morrow night and yourselves on the morning of Saturday."

Then Perez paid him half the passage money. So the *Reckoning* was provided with two more passengers.

I suppose that Dick, as he went about his business, dismissed them from his mind. He may have wondered a moment why Perez was so suspicious of Matteo Pulci, who had no worse name than other dubious mariners. But if he thought of them more than a moment it was merely to think that they would be amusing. He judged Perez a poltroon and the woman too fond of making eyes, but they had a humorous method in their faults which appealed to him.

All these last days in Genoa were crowded with business, and any time which was free of that was given to eager dreams of the maiden of Assynton; but before he slept that night Perez obtruded himself again. Captain Rymingtowne feeling, as I conceive, much in love, chose to pace the quay after supper and look at the stars in the water when he ought to have been in bed. His walk took him past the ship of Matteo Pulci, and as he passed he heard Perez's voice. He checked, and in the moonlight saw Perez standing at the gangway beside Matteo. They shook hands. Then Perez came ashore. Captain Rymingtowne took two paces forward and met him chest to chest, nose to nose, and said:

"God save you!" Perez recoiled so violently that he was almost gone backwards into the water. "Yes. You had no thought of seeing me," said Captain Rymingtowne grimly. "Maybe you had no wish for me to see you."

Perez laughed nervously.

"How you frightened me! The truth is, my friend—be kind and do not tell my wife—the truth is, I am a great coward."

"Hasn't she found out?" Captain Rymingtowne sneered.

"Ah, my friend, among women I am a very Hector. But among men," he shrugged, "one is what one is made." He took Captain Rymingtowne's arm: "Confess that you were surprised to see me talking to that pirate?"

"Confess you never meant me to, my lad."

Perez laughed.

"I have had to give up being ashamed. I had no time for anything else. But yes—I did not mean you to know. One does not like to publish one's weakness. The beast—he has bled me! He pretended that I had taken pasasge with him. He threatened to sue me for the money. And I—I want to get back to Spain. I had to make my peace with him. He would have put the officers upon me for a debtor about to fly the city. It cost me twenty ducats to buy him off. A pirate! A leech!" He invoked several saints. "Alas! it is such as I who foster such as he. But what would you? I was born a timid man. My good friend, walk with me to my lodging. The streets are unsafe o' nights."

Captain Rymingtowne jeered at him all the way, and afterwards, turning him over in thought, felt a contemptuous liking for him grow stronger. The fellow was so frankly feeble, so naively mean.

In the morning, it amused him to see that Matteo Pulci's ship was gone. Doubtless Pulci had never meant to stay and go to law. He only wanted to frighten money out of the poor Perez. Plainly he knew Senor Perez well.

That night, about sunset, the baggage of husband and wife was duly brought aboard. There was not much of it after all. It appeared that the inheritance from the cousin, whatever its worth, was not bulky. Yet the bundle attracted the interest of that first passenger, Annibale Gaddi, who came delicately to Captain Rymingtowne where he sat lonely upon the poop with amorous meditation and a dish of cherries.

"Am I wrong, sir, if I argue by this," he waved towards the baggage, "that I am to have more than your society aboard?"

Captain Rymingtowne spat out cherry stones.

"Ay, ay. A gallant and his wife for Spain. Peaceable creatures. And for the rest—well, we be all flesh and blood."

"For Spain?" Messer Gaddi repeated. "I did not know that you would call at any port in Spain."

He was a man who always seemed to mean more than he said. Dick looked at him queerly.

"And why will I not touch at Spain, if you please?"

Annibale spread out a white hand.

"Why not or why—what do I know? But some of you English mariners have found trouble in Spanish ports, with the Holy Office or in other matter. You English and the Spaniards—you do not much love each other in these days?"

Dick shrugged.

"Nor love nor hate. I'll have no trouble, my friend. Never fear, you shall come safe to England. We'll be in Cadiz and out again, and not lose a day by it."

"They are for Cadiz?" Gaddi said. "I have some acquaintance there. May I know their name?"

"Perez, he calls himself. A little fellow with a wife which thinks she is pretty."

"I never heard of him," said Gaddi, and turned away.

Captain Rymingtowne relapsed to his cherries and his thoughts of love.

In the morning, early, Perez and his wife came aboard, so early that Captain Rymingtowne had but just done breakfast and Annibale was not out of his cabin.

"It's you for catching the worm, my lad," said Captain Rymingtowne.

"I confess I am in a hurry to be going," Perez laughed.

"This is an unsafe town for a quiet man."

"And I was afraid you might go without us," his wife flushed.

"Was not that silly?" She looked at Dick from the corners of her eyes.

"Why, I would not call you a fool," said Dick, and looked at her without reverence. She knew how to make the most of her shape, and it was worth showing. A mantilla of black lace set off piquantly the strange harmony of her yellow hair and golden brown skin, and the blue eyes were big and bright. "You don't know when you are well off, you landmen. A sailor never goes o' shipboard till he must, but here you come hours before your time, and the other we ha' had for days."

"The other?" said Perez in a hurry. "You have another passenger?"

His wife looked at him.

"Oh, ay," Dick laughed. "A tremendous fellow, my lad. A bully, a fire-eater!"

"You should have told me," said Perez nervously. "Who is he? What is his name?"

"He looks like a man, and he calls himself Annibale Gaddi."

"I never heard of him," said Perez, and still seemed troubled.

"You'll have time to cure that," Dick grinned, and at this moment the precise face of Annibale Gaddi appeared at the top of the companion ladder. "Begin now: the most illustrious Annibale Gaddi, the most heroic Miguel Perez, who is silly enough to keep a wife."

The two men showed no liking for his wit. They stared at each other with something of distrust, something of defiance. It was a long minute before either spoke.

"We are to be shipmates, I hear, sir," Gaddi said coldly.

"I am honoured."

"The pleasure is mine," said Perez. "You are for Spain, sir?"

"No, sir, I leave you there. I stay by the ship."

"Indeed! Well, I shall have time to make your acquaintance," said Perez. They bowed again. "You—you go on in the ship?" Perez suggested.

"I am bound for England, sir." Then Gaddi turned to Dick: "And count myself happy in sailing with such a captain."

"There is none could please me so well," Perez cried out, and smirked at Dick, and looked at his wife.

"It's a very knight of the sea, I am sure," said she, and languished.

But Dick, who was bored, grunted out:

"You've to know me yet. Try my breakfast. Maybe you'll not eat much more, my lads."

Perez started.

"I do not know what you mean by that?"

"I'll have you at sea by nightfall."

"Well, sir?"

"Do you never get sea-sick?" Captain Rymingtowne grinned. On which omen they went below.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE GOLD SHIP

OF the breakfast Captain Rymingtowne records that it was as oily as the introduction. He felt, I infer, that Gaddi and Perez together were much more tedious than apart, but nothing else

about them seems to have occurred to him. He left them soon, and was busy in his cabin and later on deck. They remained below, playing chess, as he was told, but the lady "buzzed about him like a fly," while he checked men and lists with the boatswain. He decided that she was purely a fool.

That afternoon, a little before sunset, they sailed. Pacing the poop while the land drew away, watching the white city lose its form and melt into a cloud, Captain Rymingtowne became pensive and as sentimental as he was able. Genoa had served him well; Genoa had been rest and safety through five years of crowded strife, and now that he was leaving her for ever she seemed something like home. There was to be a real home, of course, now, away on the great shoulder of the grey-green downs, with the woman of his need to glorify life. But as night came down on the sea and Genoa was no more than a gleam of fading lights, as the ship drove on through black water, home seemed far and very far, and all his life's desire, all that he had fought for, a dream. From this condition he was waked by Gaddi at his elbow.

"I should, without doubt, be troublesome if I asked for a word apart."

Captain Rymingtowne glanced round. They were alone on the poop.

"You're as much apart as you're like to be unless you jump over side."

Gaddi looked all about him, too.

"I think that Señor Perez is below with his wife."

"Then I am sorry for him," quoth Captain Rymingtowne.

"I do not think her such a fool as she would have you think her," said Gaddi suavely.

"You may fall in love with her for what I care."

"I do not think she intends that it is to be I who should fall in love with her."

"Well, that's modest in you. And if you're right, it's modest in her."

"I did not say that she was modest."

Captain Rymingtowne was irritated.

"For God's sake say something or don't say anything."

"I shall endeavour. May I ask what you know of Señor Perez?"

"As much as I know of you, my lad. His money is good."

Gaddi drew himself up.

"I will remind you, Captain, that I was introduced to you by persons of repute. Was he?"

"What's your quarrel with him?"

"I shall take pains to have none. I do not think that Señor Perez is a man whom persons of condition honour with a quarrel."

"I thought you had never heard of him."

"I had not. That is why I have no confidence in him. For once I came upon a man in Rome, who was not called Perez, who had a very evil fame, and who fled the city, leaving two men dead in his lodging. And this man is as like him as you are like the man you see in the glass."

Captain Rymingtowne whistled.

"You seem to have some pleasant friends, my lad. What do you want me to do?"

"Ask yourself what harm he can do you. And see that he does not do it."

Captain Rymingtowne considered Messer Gaddi without affection.

"I am good at that trade, my lad."

Suddenly Perez's wife fluttered up to them with a giggling question of what they two old fogeys were talking about.

"Supper," said Captain Rymingtowne, and made for it. Gaddi was very affable to Señor Perez over the meal. Neither of them had yet become sea-sick. They accommodated themselves to shipboard like seasoned travellers. But there was no reason why they should not be.

In the morning, early, as Captain Rymingtowne stood naked while two seamen flung buckets of water at him, he saw Perez's head and shoulders rise from below. He expressed surprise, not delicately. He had not suspected Señor Perez of a desire to rise superfluously soon or become superfluously clean. But it appeared that Perez had not come for a bath. He was wholly dressed. What he wanted was conversation, and he began it while Captain Rymingtowne put on his breeches in the sunshine.

"Our good friend Gaddi is not afoot o' mornings," he said with something of a sneer. "Candle light is more in his way than sunrise."

"To be sure it's a gentlemanly taste," said Captain Rymingtowne, and buttoned his shirt.

"Gentlemanly!" Perez laughed. "Indeed, a dainty gentleman."

"Dainty's the word for him," Captain Rymingtowne agreed benevolently.

"I see you know him," Perez sneered.

"I know what he pays. I give you my word it's enough."

"He would pay well," said Perez thoughtfully. "But I wonder why?"

Captain Rymingtowne turned to stare.

"You seem to know him well enough to ask him, my lad."

Perez laughed.

"Yes, I think I know him. You look suspicious, sir. I told you I had never heard of him. When I knew him he was not called Gaddi. He was a spy then. I am wondering if he is a spy now."

"God bless you, there's nought for him to spy on but you," Captain Rymingtowne laughed.

Perez was startled, and for a moment uncomfortable, then he went on with bland dignity:

"Nay, he can do me no harm that I know. But if you have enemies, sir, look to it. For Gaddi is such a man as they would choose to discover your secrets. And he is cunning in his trade. As for me—I know nothing he can do unless he tell you slanders about me."

"God help us! Why would he do that?" quoth Captain Rymingtowne.

"For fear you should believe if I told you what he is. For fear you should be warned against him."

"Now here's craft," Captain Rymingtowne gaped; "here's craft to be sure."

"Who, I? Nay, craft lies below," quoth Perez, but it may be that he heard steps. For when in a moment Gaddi came on deck, Señor Perez was talking eagerly of when they would be in sight of land again.

At the first opportunity—he was not delicate in making one—Captain Rymingtowne left the two suspicious gentlemen and went forward. He wanted to think about them. That each should be anxious for him to believe the other a rogue was something more than humorous. That each was a rogue, he believed easily. His mind was always apt to such an opinion. It was the reciprocal anxiety to urge it on him which was disturbing. Why should either care what he thought of the other? Neither was anything to him. Or why should two rascals hate

each other because they found themselves in company on his ship? They could have nothing to do there?

He records briefly that he had no suspicion of the truth. He made up his mind that they were spiteful fools, perhaps with old scores to clear, perhaps both in the same dirty business, which, whatever it was, could be no business of his. There were not many things in his well-managed life with which he was dissatisfied. His conduct in this affair seems to have made him smart whenever he remembered it.

The two had spent much of their time at chess. Not so much, Captain Rymingtonne now perceived, from any affection for the game or each other's society, as the desire of each to make sure that the other was doing nothing behind his back. All that day, too, they played chess, while Perez's wife haunted the poop and made alluring attitudes and eyes. Captain Rymingtonne, having at last nothing better to do, allowed her to engage him.

"You avoid me, sir," she complained with a challenging smile. "Am I beneath the dignity of a captain?"

"I'll swear I never thought so," said Captain Rymingtonne with enthusiasm. She lowered her eyelashes coquettishly. "For I never thought about you."

"Oh! Indeed you hit with a bludgeon, sir. And am I so little account?" she languished in comely curves.

"You are doubtless all that is alluring, my friend. But I am never allured while my ship's at sea."

The Señora Perez sighed deeply.

"I see that you dislike me. Confess that you dislike me."

"I have no time for it."

"Ah, you are all contempt! There is something in me; you distrust me, sir? Indeed, it is cruel."

"My lady, I only distrust people who matter to me."

"Oh, you are worse and worse!" she protested prettily. "What is it you have against me? You have heard some ill of my husband? You suspect him? You——"

"I suspect we are making fools of ourselves. So I'll walk for'ard." With which he left her. He saw that she had been put up by her husband to find out whether he had been listening to Gaddi, and what he believed. He began to be bored by the whole affair. The fools were tiresome. Doubtless they would both be the better of a hanging, but to worry him about which

deserved it most was intolerable. And the woman with her world-old coquetries insulted his intelligence.

But if his intelligence had not been so contemptuous, or if even he had looked back at her after he turned away, he might have found something more in her than the weary craft of the decoy.

He records nothing more in particular of this part of the voyage, except that, as soon as the Spanish coast was in sight, and long before they were near Cadiz, Perez appeared anxiously impatient to arrive. They came into Cadiz bay after sunset, and, as Captain Rymingtowne had no mind to fumble his way past islets into a strange harbour by night, they anchored to wait the dawn. To this delay, however, Perez had no objection, and he was good enough to say so to Captain Rymingtowne, thus making himself the butt of sardonic insolence. For Captain Rymingtowne, I find, much disliked the comments of landsmen on what he did with his ship.

Not abashed, Señor Perez was up on deck before dawn, and "jumping about like a flea" (I quote Captain Rymingtowne) while they had the anchor up and got under way. The wind was easterly, which gave them some trouble, but the tide ran strong. It was a morning of great beauty. The tall marble houses on the limestone headland were at first all golden above the dark water, and then, as the light came in flood from the cloudless east, shining like a city of jewels. Perez expressed his delight so banally, with such a base landsman's yearning to be on the land, that Captain Rymingtowne addressed him with a mordant voice:

"Well, you're mighty glad to have done with us, my lad. It's kind in you to help us feel the same for you."

At which Gaddi, who had also chosen to be on deck betimes, desiring, as he said politely, to see the last of Señor Perez, sniggered with delicacy. Perez's wife, who was very close by her husband, looked timidly at him, and then at Captain Rymingtowne with an expression of pity which he did not the least understand, but seems to have remembered. After a minute Perez explained volubly that he was intoxicated with joy at being come again to his native land and his children, of whom they had not before heard. He then gushed forth professions of obligation and friendship to Captain Rymingtowne. I suppose he was nervous.

Captain Rymingtowne anchored his ship off the town between

the two castles, which is certainly evidence enough that he neither intended nor expected trouble. The Spanish ambassador in his plaint to the Privy Council denied this, but was refuted into silence. The cable was hardly out before Perez rushed upon Captain Rymingtowne and grasped his hand:

"My friend, a thousand thanks for a most felicitous voyage. You have entertained us as though we were friends and kinsfolk."

"I'll not say that you have not entertained me," said Captain Rymingtowne. "Is your baggage packed?"

"We shall not forget your courtesy," Perez cried, and looked a volume of instigation at his wife. But she would not answer his eyes. She hung back. "Come, sir, let's make a festival of our parting."

"I am not so happy as that," Captain Rymingtowne drawled.

"I wish this were Alicante, that we could do you honour in our own home. But at least let us show you what Spanish good-will is and Spanish good fare. Come ashore with us and let us have a merry dinner." Again he looked at his wife, who was still backward, and for a moment there was something of venom in his sleek face. "Nay, I'll not be denied," he said eagerly; "you must honour us with an hour ashore, sir."

"I cannot suffer that," said Gaddi quietly.

They all looked at him—Captain Rymingtowne with amused amazement, and a "God bless you, granddad!" Perez, with that touch of venom contorting his mouth and a "You, my old friend?" The woman in surprise and fear.

Then Perez said with contempt:

"Oh, the gentleman is sore at being left out of a good dinner."

"I might be more sore of eating it," Gaddi said quietly.

"Captain Rymingtowne, if you, who are an Englishman, go ashore in Spain, you may stay there longer than you wish, which, as you observe, is no affair of mine. But my voyage would be delayed, which I should deplore."

"Now you are very tender of me, to be sure," said Captain Rymingtowne, and looked at him with a grin and a frown. "But I ha' cut my wisdom teeth, granddad, and I'll thank you not to hold my hand."

Perez laughed heartily.

"I think the old gentleman has a stomach ache. Come, sir, let's leave him to nurse it! You are in no more danger on Spanish ground than strutting your own quarter-deck. Danger,

quotha! The only danger you shall find with me is what there is in a gallon of the best from Xeres."

"I'll dine with you, my lad, when you come to Berkshire," said Captain Rymingtowne. "Now I am in a hurry to be there, and I have spent time enough already in landing you." He turned to a sailor and said in English. "Get their baggage on deck." It seems that he was now doubtful of Perez and Gaddi both. They were both too interested in him for his taste.

Perez turned to his wife, and there was something of a threat under his tone of urgent affection:

"Come, Maria, my love, the gentleman makes us seem inhospitable. Persuade him to honour us."

"I know that he will not listen to me," the woman said wearily.

Perez gave her a look like a blow. Captain Rymingtowne strode away, shouting in English:

"Get a ladder over the side. Is that baggage ready?"

Perez hurried after and cried out: "Why, sir, if you are in such a hurry to be rid of us, we'll not hinder you. Let us have a boat and be gone."

Captain Rymingtowne turned upon him and stared a moment. You have to suppose at least that he could not read his man clear. For:

"None of my men leaves the ship, my lad," he said. "We'll hail a shore boat for you." The which he did in a great roar.

Perez shrugged and made a gesture and laughed nervously.

"You—you are in an ill-humour, sir. Have your way—have your way. I am sure it is nothing to me."

"Then you'll lose nothing by it," said Captain Rymingtowne, and hailed the shore again.

From the time they anchored, or before, there had been a many watchers on the quay, and movement among them. In the last few moments their numbers had increased, and at Captain Rymingtowne's shouts there was a bustle of activity. All this, of course, was to be expected in any port. Since Cadiz had two citadels to garrison, the English seamen were not surprised to see musketeers and halberds in the crowd. So far no man on the *Reckoning* had a suspicion of the design.

Not one boat, but two, pushed off from the quay steps, and not mere cock-boats or wherries, but a pair of pinnaces and close packed with men. There were some old fellows in gowns in the stern of the first. Between the oarsmen and on the

bottom boards sat soldiers, and the smoke of their matches defiled the clear air.

Captain Rymingtowne swore an English oath, and then fiercely:

"You, Perez! What the devil is this?"

"What should it be?" Perez echoed and licked his lip. His voice sounded shrill. "It will only be the Mayor of the town come off to welcome you. We are ceremonious in Spain. We——"

Captain Rymingtowne broke from him, shouting:

"Man the capstan! All hands on deck!" There was a scurry of bare feet and the trumpet sounded, and the *Reckoning* boiled with energy. "Walk her round!" Captain Rymingtowne cried. "Gunner! Starboard carronades! Younkers aloft!"

The *Reckoning* was moving up to her anchor before the pinnaces bumped alongside. There was a tumult of arrogant shout from them to this tune:

"Halt there, English! Halt! We board you! The Corregidor comes aboard!"

"The devil he does," Captain Rymingtowne muttered, and made for the ladder. He was in time to find Perez going over the side, and he caught him by neck and wrist, and dragged him up again, and dashed him down on the deck with intent to knock the sense out of him, and succeeded. Captain Rymingtowne kicked him out of the way, and leaning on the bulwarks, shouted, "Stand off in those boats! Stand off! We are under way, and you'll be sunk, my lads!"

But already a man in a gown was on the ladder and climbing up.

"You are for a voyage, are you?" said Captain Rymingtowne. The man continued to climb.

From the bow the boatswain shouted:

"Up and down, sir."

"Break her out!" Captain Rymingtowne roared. "Ready carronades! Stand off, those shore boats, or I'll sink you, by God!" He gave the man in the gown a hand to haul him up, and before another could get firmly upon the ladder, threw it down upon the boats. "There's for you! Stand off, you fools! Now"—he turned to the man in the gown—"now, who the fiend are you?"

"Sir captain, I am the Corregidor of Cadiz. And you—you are the English Captain Rymingtowne of the ship *Reckoning*."

"Anchor's apeak!" the boatswain shouted.

"You'll have time to know me, my lad," quoth Captain Rymingtowne, and shouted, "Shake out the mainsail," and walked aft to con his ship.

The Corregidor pursued him, crying:

"Sir, you are under arrest, you and your ship. I arrest you in the name of the King of Spain!"

"God bless him!" said Captain Rymingtowne. The *Reckoning* was going through the water and the pinnaces laboured after her with shouts. From one came a ragged volley of musketry. Captain Rymingtowne turned on the Corregidor. "Now, confound your eyes, this is war!"

"Sir, you are under arrest, I say. You insult the King of Spain. I command you to anchor."

Captain Rymingtowne said something coarse.

The outer citadel was now abeam. From its walls came white puffs of smoke and thunder, but again and again the balls whistled harmlessly through the rigging. As they drew away there was a crash and roar of rent canvas and tackle, and half the mizzen topmast came thudding down on deck with men bleeding beneath it.

Captain Rymingtowne put passion into oaths. But, recording this, he adds piously that the providence of God would not suffer them to be delivered to their enemies. For he was not hurt, nor the helmsman, nor the wheel nor steering gear. The ship held on her course, and for all the wreckage had lost little of her press of sail. She drew out of range without more harm.

When with axe and lever they cleared away the wreck, it was found that one youngster lay dead, and another and the trumpeter had hurts on head and rib and arm. And besides, the wife of Perez lay on the deck, distorted and very still, moaning.

While scamen toiled her husband had found his feet, and, still dazed, began to look about him and mutter. He saw her plight, but did not come to her.

Captain Rymingtowne having had his men borne away forward under the coxswain's care, the best surgeon they had, bent over her and raised her head.

"A bad business is it?" said he to her moans. "Can you stand, my girl?"

Gaddi sauntered up with some curiosity in his cold face. From the bulwarks where he was watching the shore line, Perez, I suppose, turned to look.

The woman gazed up into Captain Rymingtowne's face, and, after a minute, which seems to have impressed him strangely—he talks about a tenderness as of one who was glad to suffer—she smiled.

"You; you would not listen to me," she said, and then she laughed gaily, innocently, like a child. Again her face was drawn with pain. "You would not take me," she muttered. "You are the first." Captain Rymingtowne confesses that he was troubled by the cold shame in her eyes. She raised herself a little. "For the love of God, kiss me—kiss me!" she cried. Captain Rymingtowne bent over her.

I suppose that Perez had drawn near before. Captain Rymingtowne was only aware of him crying, "Curse you! You've played me false!" as he drove the dagger into her breast.

Captain Rymingtowne let her fall, and sprang round to seize him, but he had rushed to the bulwarks and dived into the water, and was seen striking out tumultuously for the distant shore.

The gunner came running with a musket.

"Let be," said Captain Rymingtowne. "There's water enough to drown him. Let him die slow," and he turned away. Then his eye was taken by Gaddi, who came sauntering calmly towards him. It was natural, you will agree, that he should be irritated. He protests that Gaddi had been for some time insufferable, and this callousness in the affair of the woman was the last straw. I think that the adventures of the morning had so wrought upon him that he was aching for a chance to explode.

With a rare, vehement ferocity he swore at Gaddi:

"You—and a plague on you! Why in God's name could you not stay him, you limp, languid fool?"

Gaddi shrugged.

"You forget yourself, Captain. You are impudent."

Captain Rymingtowne looked him up and down.

"Now the Lord confound your wooden face," said he. "You'd face me out, would you? You would talk me down? I'll handle you, my lad. Why, you are no better stuff than your brother that's over the side."

It seems that Gaddi's lean, controlled face exhibited some alarm. He cried out:

"You talk like a fool, sir. What's the fellow to me?"

Captain Rymingtowne was in a mood to find treachery everywhere. "That's what I'll find out, my lad," quoth he. "You know too much, and you do too little. Gunner! Take him in guard, take him forward, him and the Spaniard. Keep them apart, keep them in sight."

"This is not to be borne," Gaddi cried, as a seaman laid hands on him. "What do you intend, sir?"

"To know what you knew of the rat, and what he knew of you, and what you are!"

"Sir, you'll not dare," Gaddi stormed.

"Now bless your eyes, get forward," cried the gunner, and thrust him down the ladder to the waist.

Captain Rymingtowne began to pace the deck. You are not to suppose him anxious. He had, to be sure, run away with the Corregidor of Cadiz, and for that Spain would demand satisfaction. But he and his ship had been fired upon in time of peace, without cause, and it was not to be supposed that any Government—least of all the Government which breathed the spirit of Queen Elizabeth—would allow that the King had a claim against him. Not fear, but passion for revenge, made his thoughts unsteady. He had seen men of his killed wantonly. You misconceive him if you do not know that his soul was insurgent for the chance to draw blood from the power that had killed them. Of course he could do it. He could make it easy to snap up a Spanish craft with rich freight enough. It was the season of the coming of the ships from South America with those cargoes of silver and gold which made Spain dominant in the world. The summer's end always saw one or more of them sail in to Cadiz. But to seize one would be flat piracy. England could not protect him. When Spain asked for her gold and the head of the man who stole it, it was impossible that she should be denied. England would not risk war to declare her sea captains pirates. War might be coming, but he knew his Queen well enough to know that she would seek a better occasion and sacrifice without an argument any man whose folly gave her trouble. Yet he coveted those gold ships passionately. To snatch one of them would be a blow to make Spain wince, a revenge that would ring through Christendom. His anger cried that he was shamed if he were content with less.

It is hard to imagine him resolving to fling his own life away for the sake of rage over dead men. But he was, beyond doubt,

much agitated and unsure of himself. To grow calmer, to make his brain master again, he went below and set himself to unravel the mystery from which the whole bad business sprang. He had no doubt, as soon as he could make himself think, that Perez had sought a passage to Cadiz to bring him within the grasp of Spain. The woman's task, of course, was to lull his suspicions, to allure him, to decoy him ashore, and because she had turned honest and shrank from that, her husband conceived that she had blabbed and put Captain Rymingtowne on guard. But who had set Perez on?

Captain Rymingtowne began to go through his baggage. Very soon he found letters from the Governor of Valencia and Don Alonzo Girono, which made the scheme plain. They were pleased to call Captain Rymingtowne many ill names. They desired to have him and his crew in prison and confiscate his ship. Perez had been paid five hundred ducats to bring the *Reckoning* into a Spanish harbour, Valencia or Alicante or another. As soon as he knew to which Captain Rymingtowne would consent to go, he was charged to send word. That explained everything, including Perez's strange visit to the Genoese ship. Once in harbour Perez was to get Captain Rymingtowne on shore, if he could, but the Corregidor of the port would be warned and have a guard ready. Altogether it was a very neat plan. Captain Rymingtowne formally ascribes his escape to Providence.

Discovering how well the plan was laid, he seems to have become cooler. So much for Perez—a rogue of high abilities. But what, then, of Messer Annibale Gaddi? He had confessed a knowledge of Perez. Perez had talked of knowing him. They were doubtless a pair of the professional traitors in which the age abounded. What if they knew more than they said? Gaddi had suspected something of Perez's plot, and shown it by his warnings. How much did he know? Why had he not chosen to speak clearly till the last? Did he fear what Perez might tell of him? Had he a plot of his own?

Captain Rymingtowne went to Gaddi's cabin. For some time he found nothing of interest but a coffer heavy with money, but at last, dealing brutally with a locked leather wallet, such as a man might carry in his bosom at a pinch, he found a mass of papers. The first defied him, being in Latin, though he could see they were from Rome, and addressed to Englishmen. That was more than enough for suspicions. Soon he came to Spanish,

and found himself in the midst of a conspiracy that brought the blood to his brow. There had been rumours of war and revolt, and the Queen's murder many a year. Here were plans of war and murder instant. The Queen was to be "taken out of the way." The Duke of Alva was to land in Essex with twenty thousand men. And here a letter from the King of Spain himself to the Duke of Norfolk promised him the Viceroyalty of England. Not the Duke of Norfolk only, but half a dozen other men of note, it was plain, had sworn themselves to Spain, and Spain sent money and promised arms. The autumn was to see England in flames.

Captain Rymingtowne flung himself back in his chair. Here under his hand was matter enough to warrant him, though he sank every ship which bore the Spanish flag. The man who brought that wallet to the Queen's council might laugh at any plaint of Spain. I do not find evidence that he was familiar with Scripture, but he professes that he cried out as he gripped the wallet again:

"The Lord hath delivered them into my hand."

He gave orders that Gaddi was to be strictly guarded. He took care that Gaddi should know nothing of what he had discovered by telling no man anything. And of what he meant to do he told nothing, but for a week the *Reckoning* beat to and fro between Cape St. Vincent and Cadiz Bay, always just out of sight of land.

At the end of a week they sighted a carrack deep in the water, weather-beaten from an ocean voyage, plainly to a seaman's eye one of the treasure ships from the Indies. She laboured on, fearing nothing. The *Reckoning* ran close and gave two broadsides that brought her mainmast down before she fired a shot. Then Captain Rymingtowne boarded her, and, such plight was she in, took her without a man lost. Only the boatswain had a pike between his ribs, of which, since he was fat, the wound healed slowly. They found aboard her a hundred and fifty thousand pesos of gold and some silver, besides pearls and emeralds, the which they put aboard the *Reckoning*, and left the carrack to take the news home to Spain. So they made sail for Bristol very merrily.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE LONDON ROAD

ALDERMAN FRY had grown in girth and conceit of himself. Hence a turning of his chin towards heaven and an oscillation of his gait. For neither in conceit nor girth had he ever been lacking. It is stranger that he had become in a degree mellow. He was now civil to his equals and almost genial to his apprentices. He was even on speaking terms with his daughter. Thus you see that prosperity may be good for a man.

He was accounted the richest fellow in Bristol. The endeavours of Captain Rymingtowne had sent him from the Mediterranean moneys and merchandise which surprised him and dazzled his neighbours. His own considerable energy caused these gains to multiply fast. Behind his back folks said that his seafaring, his capture by the Moors, and his days of slavery had made him twice as good a man of business. It seems certain that these vicissitudes made him more than twice as human. But that was easier.

So as he strutted the quay he was saluted with much honour and some affection. He was more than commonly friendly. His spirits were exuberant. He had been advised that Captain Rymingtowne and his profitable ship the *Reckoning* were coming home at last, and he conceived that if Captain Rymingtowne was ready to make an end of the venture, there must be a noble account to render. According to the letters from Genoa, the ship was some weeks behind her time, and if any other captain had been aboard her he might have been uneasy. It was not possible for him to think that Captain Rymingtowne could fail. Therefore he took the air on the quay, exuding satisfaction. But if he felt divinely prosperous and important, he was not in other ways a fool. For days past he had remarked strangers in Bristol who took an interest in him. Some two or three of them had made acquaintance with him and been very conversational. None of them confessed any knowledge of the others, and yet he had found reason to believe that they were all friends. On this October morning he saw them on the quay again, and two pleasant babblers, engaging him in talk, began to ask questions of the *Reckoning*. He remembered that their conversation had set the same way before. And as before he dismissed the *Reckoning* and its business carelessly, like a trifle

beneath a great merchant's notice. But he did not dismiss them. He was very affable on many matters, trying to discover what their trade might be. He could make certain of nothing but that they were no merchants. It was equally important that he could not be certain one of them was English. He began to wonder what the *Reckoning* had been doing, and what would happen when she came home. He was not frightened.

That night after supper there was a little rapping at his back door. The man whom his servant brought up through the garden was Captain Rymingtowne. It says much for the reformation of Alderman Fry that he gave greeting with a grip of both hands, and a hearty "My dear lad! Here's a happy day!" before he asked after the ship.

"I ha' not brought her with me," said Captain Rymingtowne grimly.

The alderman changed colour and coughed. But he still behaved well.

"I'll be bound it's no fault of yours," quoth he.

Captain Rymingtowne laughed.

"It is not," he agreed. "I could never get her through your back door. Take heart, old gentleman. She's safe enough. She'll be near Avonmouth by now."

"You came ashore?" The alderman was still startled. "You came on by land?"

"From Bridgewater. And why? Because I look for more trouble at home in England than in ten year of sea, fighting the heathen. I ha' gutted a Spanish treasure ship, and all her gold is aboard the *Reckoning*."

The alderman breathed heavily.

"We be at peace with Spain," he said. "This is flat piracy."

"Pirates it is," quoth Captain Rymingtowne. "Be you afraid?"

You see the two of them stare at each other. Captain Rymingtowne, big and everywhere rectangular, his face lean and dark brown, the heavy chin thrust out, the eyes very deep beneath the brow; the alderman all curves of fat, his bald shiny head, his full face crimson with good living, the protruding eyes blinking nervously. Yet in his straight, close lips, in his calm pose, there is something of the pugnacity, something of the resolution obvious in Captain Rymingtowne.

"Spain will want her gold back, Dick Rymingtowne, and your head with it," said the alderman quietly. "There have

been some queer folk in Bristol this week or more asking me after you."

Captain Rymingtowne laughed.

"I guessed that. Well, old gentleman, will you stand with me?"

"I ha' done well by you this ten year," said the alderman. "I'll stand with you short of losing my head with you. But I doubt not you lost it, my lad, when you played pirates with Spain." He looked puzzled. "Yet that's not like you neither."

"It is not," said Captain Rymingtowne with satisfaction. "Look you now. Spain fired on me first. I was in Cadiz harbour, peaceful, about no harm, and the forts tried to sink me. So I went out and took a ship to pay for my spars. Was that like me?"

"Maybe. But maybe they'll not thank you at Court for making war on Spain."

"Will they not? I had caught aboard my ship an Italian spy which was bringing letters to the Duke of Norfolk and many another promising them Spanish money and arms for a rebellion. There's a great, devilish plot. And I have it all here"—he tapped his chest. "Now d'ye take me? When Madame Queen reads what I have here she'll not quarrel with me for taking toll of Spain. So I am for London as fast as I can ride. I thought I should be hindered here if I came openly aboard the *Reckoning*. The Spanish Embassy will have wind of me, and the Spaniards and their friends will be quaking for that spy of theirs and his letters. So there will be trouble when the *Reckoning* comes in—that's the business of those queer folk of yours. And here's your part: let none of them aboard her; let no man get wind of what she brings till you have word from me in London. Can you keep all safe?"

"On my own ship in Bristol harbour?" The alderman laughed. "I think so! I think so! 'Sheart, let me see the man who will meddle with her! Saving the Queen's writ."

"They'll not have that yet. They'll not dare, not knowing how much I know. But I doubt they'll try your mayor and magistrates."

"How much is the gold aboard her?" said the alderman.

"A hundred thousand pesos."

The alderman lost his breath.

"A hundred thousand pesos! My dear lad!" He chuckled. "Us Bristow folk, we stand together. I'll answer for Master

Mayor and the bench. Oh, we're right Englishmen in Bristol. My dear lad!"

"And so good-night to you," quoth Captain Rymingtowne. "I have stayed too long"; and he would stay no moment longer, even for a toast to his ship.

He was not, I conceive, at his best on a horse. There was too much bone in him for the fastest going. But, like several of his descendants, he could drive a horse along, and it appears from the record of this journey that upon it he did go marvelously. You understand his zeal. The letters of Annibale Gaddi, as you may learn from the histories, were enough to set England aflame if they reached those for whom they were meant. If they came to Elizabeth and my Lord Burghley, some of the proudest peers would be attainted and struck down, and the ambassador of Spain would have an overwhelming charge to answer. No wonder that Messer Gaddi had friends anxiously waiting him in Bristol. For the Spanish Embassy had had time to learn that the ship by which he was coming had dared attack the treasure fleet of the Most Catholic King. It was of instant importance to many powerful persons that they should discover whether her captain had been prompted to such desperate villainy by detection of Messer Gaddi's secrets.

Captain Rymingtowne, who, save once or twice, gave his enemies credit for wits, appreciated this amply, and rode hard through the night. One thing, and one thing only that I can see, was in his favour. He knew the road from Bristol to Reading as a dog knows the way from kitchen to kennel. As he came by the cross-roads of Newton St. Leo he thought he heard horses behind him. Over the four miles to Bath he made sure of it, and swore according to his abilities. The Spanish rogues were keener than they had right to be. To land at Bridgewater, to steal into Bristol and out again by night, should have given him a day's law. But plainly the alderman's house had been watched, and the rogues had marked their quarry.

He says that he then congratulated himself, because he had not trusted to himself alone; because he had landed another man at Bridgewater, and sent him off with other papers by a different road. But if I understand Captain Rymingtowne, there was not much congratulation of any one in his mind. It was entirely busy with hatred and malice.

He came to Bath and knocked up the ostler at the Rose and Crown, and loudly proclaimed that he was tired out and would

sleep for a week. He had hardly been lighted to a bare room when his pursuers rode into the yard. He blew out his candle and bolted his door and stole to the window. He heard a genial diplomatic conversation, in which, without asking the ostler anything direct, his pursuers learnt that a gentleman had come just before them with a horse near foundered, himself not much better, and gone to bed. They seemed satisfied. As they tramped along the passage to their room one tapped at his door. Dick grunted sleepily. There was tapping again. Then in the sleepest voice he drawled out, "Go to the devil and come back in the morning," to which there was laughter and whispering, and then silence. They had concluded that till the morning he was safe, or that it was dangerous to be violent.

Captain Rymingtowne waited an hour and then got out of the window. He stole up to the ostler's loft, waked him, and silenced his grumbling with a gold piece, gave another for the hire of a fresh horse, and was away. All through the night he rode without alarm, and all the next day, till at Reading, reeling in the saddle for lack of sleep and food, he judged it safe to halt. He dined vigorously and slept a sailor's four hours, and was lounging out to the inn yard, when a smiling fellow met him with—

"How goes the world, Captain Rymingtowne?"

"God bless you, who is he?" Dick drawled, and stared at his man stupidly. Three other fellows with a bottle of wine were watching.

The man laughed and struck him jovially on the shoulder.

"What, would you deny your name, Captain? Why, what's the matter?"

"The matter's a maggot in your head, my lad. I be none of your captains."

"'Sheart, sir, you give me the lie?" the man cried, and clapped hand on his sword. The fellows behind started up.

"Here, drawer—here, landlord!" Dick called. "Here's brawling! Here's a bully which draws sword upon me, and me a peaceful man with an errand to the mayor."

The landlord came boisterously to the rescue, protesting of the credit of his house, and Dick slunk away in a hurry. He was aware of one of the wine-drinkers following him, and he asked loudly of an ostler where the mayor kept house.

All the way there the spy tracked him, but ventured no hostility. His worship the mayor was a tanner, and busy

among his pits. Having seen Captain Rymingtowne pass the yard gates, the spy retired to a discreet distance. Captain Rymingtowne found the way, looked him over, determined (so he says) that his worship was "a brisk lad who would do the business," and answered a curt greeting with—

"Good morrow to you! Walk apart. I've a word for your ear."

"Make it short, sir."

"I am a sea captain, Rymingtowne to name, new come to Bristol after a voyage from Italy and Spain. I ride to London with papers for the Queen and Council—papers, to be short with you, worth the Queen's own life. Now, sir, here are traitors and vile foreigners seeking to make an end of these and me. As I came out of my inn I marked three or four which have pursued me from Bristol, and one of them tried to fix a quarrel on me. Prithee, if you be her Majesty's loyal subject, lay them by the heels."

"What then? Will you appear against them? Will you swear them traitors?"

"Not I. I must for London with what speed I can. But I would not have them after me to cut my throat and steal my papers as soon as I be beyond the town."

"And that's reason, too," said the mayor, and scratched his head. "But law's law, my lad, and how can I send folks to gaol wi' naught sworn against 'em?" Then he winked. "But brawlers, says you? We'll have 'em in the stocks for brawlers and rogues and masterless men. What, Robin, go call the constables, and bid 'em call the watch. Come in and crack a quart, Captain. We'll give 'em a night and a day cooling their heels, and when they're out again you'll be safe in London."

"You shall not be sorry for it," said Captain Rymingtowne, and referred him to Alderman Fry and the squire of Assynton.

In a little while Captain Rymingtowne passed out through the tanyard gates with the mayor and his posse, and saw the spy scud away. When they came to the inn the quarrelsome gentleman and his fellows were already getting to horse. Captain Rymingtowne pointed them out, and then went round the corner. There was much protest and some scuffling; but to threats and complaints the mayor was deaf, and with blows his constables dealt truculently. Captain Rymingtowne saw a company of four haled away, and was satisfied. But he was

not quite sure that there had not been five in the party. He rode out of Reading meditative.

His doubt was determined as he came through Maidenhead thicket. Soon after Twyford he had thought that he was followed. He made sure of it in the next six miles. But there was only one on his track, and of one he had no fear. He rode hard, not so much for shaking off the spy (which, in fact, he never did) as to make London before midnight. In Slough he took a fresh horse, and so did the spy. It was dark then, or soon after. They kept the same pace and the same distance apart for some fifteen miles or more. On the London side of Brentford Captain Rymingtonne was surprised by the spy's passing and spurring on till sight and sound of him were altogether lost. He could not tell what to make of it. The spy might not be a spy after all. He was not sure of having seen the man's face among the wine-drinkers. It was possible, though hardly credible, that his close pursuit for thirty miles was more chance. Or else he thought it all he could do to make sure that Captain Rymingtonne was come to London, and so had ridden on to advise his masters. Captain Rymingtonne (he blames himself for this) thought no more about him, and rode at his ease, meditating how he would approach Burghley and the Queen.

A little beyond Kensington Church some horsemen dashed out of a lane. Captain Rymingtonne was hardly aware of them before he was in the midst of them and a whirl of swords. He plucked at his own, he felt himself reel in the saddle, and all the world shook and seethed away from him.

CHAPTER XXX

BETWEEN THE SHEETS

WHEN he woke he was in bed. His head ached and throbbed, and as he moved he became aware of other pains. There were bandages on his head and his left arm, and he seemed to have bruises everywhere. As soon as he was completely conscious of his body he began to think. Then he heard a door shut, and sat up. There was no one in the room. It was a sombre place, lit by two of the narrowest windows. Wainscot and floor were dingy. No tapestry nor carpet nor even rushes clothed its

nakedness. There was no more furniture than the bed and a table beside it. But the bed had a richness of design and comfort. The table was inlaid with many coloured woods. Captain Rymingtowne was puzzled. Then it occurred to him that he had nothing on but his shirt. His clothes were not to be seen. With his clothes had gone those boasted invaluable papers. Captain Rymingtowne gave a grim chuckle.

A man came softly into the room. He was of the middle size and very neat, in black, with white at his throat and wrists. He was of middle age, quiet, even stealthy in his movements. His face was clean shaven and pale and insignificant.

"Do I see you or do I not see you?" said Captain Rymingtowne slowly. "Which is to say, are you or are you not? God help you, 'tis easier to believe you are not."

"Have you come to your senses?" the man said in English. Captain Rymingtowne laughed.

"I do think I had none for to come to, my lad. Where be I, if you please?"

"Whether you live or die, it is no use to you to know that." The man smiled. "But I do not see why you should die."

"God bless you!" said Captain Rymingtowne heartily.

"It is, in fact, wholly your own affair, and to us—to me—no matter."

"Thank you, to be sure," said Captain Rymingtowne. "And who are you?"

The man waved his hand.

"You will understand, sir, that no one who cares for your life knows you are here. Therefore it is wholly agreeable to us, if you choose, that here you should die."

Captain Rymingtowne gaped at him.

"None o' my friends knows I am here," he repeated slowly. "And so it is, to be sure. But there's some knows I am not where I ought to be."

"Bah, if you think it will help you to play with words!"

"God forgive you, would I play at anything with my head aching the way it is?" said Captain Rymingtowne plaintively.

"Hark'e—when my friends find me not where they look for me, they will be seeking me in likely places. But, maybe, you would understand better if I spoke Spanish."

The man gave no sign of discomfiture, save that it was a moment before he answered.

"Whether I am Spanish is not so much the question as whether

you are a fool. Consider, my friend. Your friends may look for you long, and not find so much as your grave!"

"There'll be more graves than mine dug over this business," said Captain Rymingtowne. He waited for an answer, and as none came at once went on more loudly—"Spanish? To be sure you're Spanish, and this the ambassador's house. Well, you ha' tied yourself in a pretty tangle." He laughed. "Ods life, I would like to know what you said when you found the papers on me was naught but copies!"

The man was visibly disconcerted. Captain Rymingtowne's command of his wits and the situation appeared to surprise him. But he recovered himself quickly.

"For my part, sir, I said, 'there is no fool so foolish as the fool who thinks he is cunning,' " and with that he put a comfit in his mouth and smiled.

"Well, well, what would you be without your joke?" said Captain Rymingtowne tolerantly, and smiled back.

There was then a pause, each gentleman waiting for the other to return to the point. Captain Rymingtowne waited the better. It is to be supposed that he had more confidence, more self-command, more conceit—what you will—or merely that he looked more irritating. For at last the man in black broke out peevishly:

"If you think you can escape, sirrah, you deceive yourself."

"Escape?" Captain Rymingtowne echoed. "God bless you, how should I without any breeches?"

"Oh, you waste my time, sir!"

"So do you mine. And God, He knows how I be to stop you. But do I grumble? Not I. It's a restful bed, and I ha' not had one long enough this ten year."

"You will play the fool, I see. I warn you, it ill suits your condition. Hark ye, sirrah! You think we dare not touch you because you have spied on our secrets—because you have stolen papers of moment—because when we laid you by the heels we found on you only copies, and not those letters themselves. But it's enough you have read the letters and know the matter of them; there's reason enough we should not let you go alive, unless you will be guided by our will."

"We, we, we," quoth Captain Rymingtowne, imitating the voice of a little pig. "Who is 'we,' so please you? The King of Spain? I make a long nose at him. Of the traitors he hath hired here? To the devil with all such!"

"You are a foul pirate, sirrah!" the man fumed.

"That in your teeth! It's your King of Spain that's a black pirate, a bully, a false thief! No harm I ever did him till he meddled with me and mine. Now, by God's heart, I'll teach him keep his paws to himself!"

The man was startled by such coarse vehemence, and in some dismay stammered out:

"You brag, sirrah. You talk like a man in wine. You mistake your condition, indeed."

"Do I so?" Captain Rymingtowne grew more vigorous as the other retreated. "There be letters signed by the King of Spain, enough to hang his hired traitors every one, and burst his vile plots and bring down bloody war upon him. And while you do stand blowing there they be coming to the Queen's own hand. And naught that you can do can stay them. Od rot you, you thought you were clever when you had me knocked o' the head! But I guessed that you would be at some such tricks, and I sent my papers by a sure way."

"Much good may it do you," said the man angrily. "Come, sirrah, have it as you will. Suppose the letters in your Queen's hand, and her ranting and roaring in her fish-wife's fashion. Suppose the headsman busy and war at hand. Why, then, do you think we shall be gentle in our revenge? If our designs be spoilt by you, be sure you shall not live to boast of it."

Captain Rymingtowne lay down in bed again.

"So be it," said he, and stretched himself. "A man has to pay for his pleasures. By God, I'll pay what I've got for a stab at Spain!"

The man seemed to find him puzzling.

"You make a bold front," he confessed. "I pay you the compliment not to believe in it. You are no fanatic to want death when you might live. Come, sir, I'll make you an offer. Give us the means to come at your messenger; let us get back our papers, and for the rest we may compound with you."

"*Plait-il?*" quoth Captain Rymingtowne.

"For the gold on your ship we will hold a generous account. Any losses you can show shall be four times paid, and for your yielding you shall have a thousand pesos."

"I'll have what I hold and no less. You may take what you can and no more," quoth Captain Rymingtowne.

"Are you ready to die, sirrah?" the man sneered.

"If I can hurt you by it, my lord."

A moment the man looked down at him.

"You will be something less stubborn when you have lacked food and drink a day," he said.

Captain Rymingtowne shut his eyes and pretended to snore. Then he heard the door bang and the click of the lock, and was alone.

What do you make of him? For my part, I incline to think that he was a little light in the head. In his record of the ferocious conversation I seem to see signs that his sober judgment thought he had been a little exuberant. It is not that I doubt his capacity for dying rather than give in. In spite of his vigorous commercial instincts, he was always, I conceive, resolute to yield nothing when his passions were moved, and that the machinations of Spain had moved him profoundly there is no doubt. But I wonder—and I think after it was all over he wondered—why he did not pretend to bargain with the Spanish diplomat. He would at least have got some breakfast by it. He might with luck and good management have won safe away. But doubtless his brain was a trifle feverish.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE AMBASSADOR'S DAUGHTER

AFTER the excitement he slept, at first with such turbulent dreams that he found himself again and again waking with a start and a cry, then more quietly without distress or fear. Evening sunlight was pouring in through the windows when he woke at his ease. The pain in his head was gone, and he laughed. Then a woman's voice said gently—

"My lord the bear likes his trap?"

He raised himself on his elbow, and saw a little plump creature smile down at him. She was vividly black and red and white. Her silver brocade was rich and set off her roundness gracefully.

"I suppose you could eat me raw?" she said, and put her head on one side.

"Without sauce, my dear," said Captain Rymingtowne.

She stooped, and set on the bed a little tray of food—a pasty and a flask of wine.

Captain Rymingtowne considered it critically, and then once more the woman.

"Who may you be?" he said.

H

"I am Isabella de Espes, the ambassador's daughter"—she made a gay curtsey—"so please you."

"You might be," Captain Rymingtowne conceded, and prodded at the pasty with a fork. "But, then, what's this?"

The lady frowned, and struck a tragic attitude.

"Aha! the knight-errant imprisoned smelleth poison in his meat! Nay, child, it will not hurt you. Eat, drink, and be merry."

"Why?" quoth Captain Rymingtowne.

"Because you had the sense to make friends of a friend of mine. Do you remember Teresa de Fazardo? A sweet child!"

Captain Rymingtowne looked her small person up and down.

"As I remember her, she would have made two of you."

"In body, good sir," she agreed. "But who knows the circumference of my soul? Teresa and I, we have loved each other as sisters do not ever since I broke her arm when she stole my Venetian doll. We were eight years old, my lord, and sweet angels. I am so still, indeed, but Teresa, you know, is married. Well, from Mercia she writ to me in London that if ever Captain Rymingtowne came near me I was to make eyes at him. The which I do, sire, according to my capacities."

Here Captain Rymingtowne began to eat. He said no grace.

Isabella's colour grew and her eyes were brighter.

"My good lord, I think Teresa guessed that you would find yourself at war with my father and Spain. Wherein she desired my good offices. But the truth is, I stand in need of yours."

Captain Rymingtowne looked up from his platter.

"God help you!" he said, with his mouth full.

She drooped a little and looked at the ground.

"Nay, sir, I know by Teresa's story that you'll not be cruel to a woman who seeks your aid in hard case."

Captain Rymingtowne, who was about his third draught of wine, put it down in a hurry.

"Why, how now?" quoth he. "What's the use of a man with his head broke?"

"Indeed, sir, it's this matter which broke your head," she said sorrowfully. "See, you have come by letters which betray a plot wherein many noble Englishmen are deep. Yes, and they will go to the scaffold if those letters reach your queen. And yet there are great and grand men among them, is it not?"

Her Spanish accent was more marked, her phrases quaint as she grew plaintive.

"You may say so," Dick said with satisfaction. "There's the Duke of Norfolk, and he holds his head high."

"The Duke of Norfolk!" she repeated. "Ah, sir, you will not be cruel! No, you are not—not for women. But I—I—oh, what if I tell you that if the Duke of Norfolk suffers I shall die!"

"Why, God ha' mercy!" Captain Rymingtowne was honestly startled. "What's he to you, or you to him?"

"Do you ask a woman what a man is to her?" Isabella murmured. "Oh, sir, you will not break my heart? You will save him?" She knelt down prettily by the bed and took Captain Rymingtowne's hands.

His face became very angular.

"Sheart, mistress!" he said. "If the Duke of Norfolk hath meddled with your heart, a traitor he is to you as well as to England. For it is in those letters that he counts to marry the Queen of Scots."

Isabella buried her face in the bedclothes and her shoulders shook.

"But I cannot give him up," she murmured. Dishevelled hair, a flushed face were lifted close to Captain Rymingtowne. "Ah, sir, you will do me grace! You will stay those letters! You will save him which is my life."

Captain Rymingtowne confesses to a pause before he answered.

"If he has made himself aught to you, a knave he is, and like a knave let him die. You are well rid of him."

"I will not believe it!" she cried. "He could not be false to me."

Captain Rymingtowne shrugged his shoulders.

"If he let you hope anything of him, false he is. For he has coveted this Scottish marriage to make him as good as a king."

"What care I?"—she grew fierce. "Did I say he had let me hope anything? It is I who hoped—who hoped——"

"I am sorry for it," said Captain Rymingtowne gravely.

She lifted her hands to him. He shook his head. She started up.

"Oh, you are hard—you are hard! You'll not help me, then? You'll not stay the letters? You'll have him die, and the saints know how many more—and for what, I pray you? Will you rest the happier?"

"I did not begin the business, mistress," said Captain Ryming-

towne. "I asked no better than to come quietly home. Spaniards forced me to strike at them; and when I struck, here was this plot stripped bare. I'll not let Queen Bess go in danger—ay, all England—to save the necks of a few rich knaves that play double to be richer."

"Well—let them die, then!" she cried fiercely. "And you—you will die first. I tell you, sir, if you will not serve him, my father will hold you there till you rot."

"If 'tis to be so, so it will be," quoth Captain Rymingtowne. "It's out of my hand now."

She stamped her foot.

"Oh, you make me rage, with your slow, cold ways! Look, you can go out to-night, safe, if you'll but do our will."

Captain Rymingtowne laughed.

"I like my own better, my dear."

"You want to die, then?" she cried. "Why have you nothing to hope—nothing to want? What was it Teresa said? There is a woman somewhere, you have. And you——"

"And I'll bid you good-night, my dear," said Captain Rymingtowne, and looked grim.

She stared at him a long minute, then muttered to herself in Spanish—she did not know, or had forgot, that he understood it—"It's a mule she will drive, poor soul!" But he could then make nothing of that. She smiled.

"You are hateful—do you understand?" she cried. "Teresa was perfectly right. A man—oh, no, a piece of wood! Well, what am I to do for you? I have no breeches, and you cannot go walking in your shirt." She rattled on at such a pace that Captain Rymingtowne was altogether puzzled. "And what would you look like in a petticoat? The Virgin forgive me! But I must see!"

She fled out.

In a little while the door opened again, and a bundle of clothes was thrown in. Captain Rymingtowne, to his vast embarrassment, found them all feminine. He could hardly persuade himself into them. The versatile Isabella was beyond his wits. Her variations on tragic despair and flippancy seemed hardly credible, and he was consumed by a fear that she meant to make him ridiculous. He sat on the edge of the bed contemplating her petticoats with horror.

Then the door opened again, and her head came in, and in Spanish she swore at him and vanished.

For some strange reason that seems to have decided him. Gingerly he tied the things on—gingerly and maladroitly. She stole in before he was finished, and gave a stifled shriek and took over the business. Captain Rymingtowne records that after she had done the things felt less as if they were slipping off. He also thanked Heaven that it was twilight. The shoes he could not get into, so she made him pull off the stockings. She tied a kerchief all over his head and neck, and spun him round telling him he was finished.

“And what Teresa ever saw in you,” quoth she—“God help the wench!—I cannot tell. Now—remember—you are the washerwoman going home, and so good-e’en to you.”

She thrust him out into the corridor, and on and on and down a narrow stairway. At the foot of it a maid servant waited, who plucked at him, crying, “Here, Mother Meg, come on with you! I’m waiting half an hour.” Arm-in-arm they went across a stable yard, and out by a little gate in the wall. They were then in a dark narrow lane with high buildings on either hand. The maid kilted her skirts and hurried; but Captain Rymingtowne, who found his bare feet at odds with the kidney stones, was slow, and she objurgated. He seems to have been humble, which I ascribe to the petticoats. At the top of the lane Captain Rymingtowne beheld a wide street, by which came marching a company of the Yeomen of the Guard. The maid servant propelled him round the corner and fled. He asked the way to Whitehall, and was told that he was in the Strand.

You guess, no doubt, that the Yeomen were on the way to ask explanations of the Spanish ambassador. The story of their coming is this. When Captain Rymingtowne landed at Bridgewater, he brought with him a youth of resolution and enterprise, Job Child, who was given the damning letter found upon Annibale Gaddi, and bidden make the best of his speed by Glastonbury and Frome to Assynton. There he was to give the packet to the squire, Mr. Rymingtowne, and tell how his captain, fearing ambush, had only taken copies with him on his way to London. The rest the captain left to Mr. Rymingtowne’s wits and good-will.

This confidence was not, as you see, disappointed. Job Child did his part, and the squire of Assynton took charge. A glance through the letters told him how to act. He had dealt with plots, Italian and Spanish, before Captain Rymingtowne was breeched. He accepted no risks. He put all his serving-men on horseback—

and some one else, but that for a different reason. Thus adequately guarded, he whirled off to London. On the day after Captain Rymingtowne was waylaid by Kensington Church the letters came to Lord Burghley's hands. There was matter enough in them to warrant any violence against the ambassador. Since Captain Rymingtowne had not come, it was thought likely that the ambassador knew why he tarried. The Yeomen were dispatched to search the Embassy and bring the ambassador to Whitehall.

You can understand that Don Guerau would be excited when the Yeomen knocked at his door. He was also much annoyed. Burghley seems to have thought that he lost his temper and his head. But I do not feel that Burghley understood his character. When the lieutenant of the Yeomen announced that he was come to search the Embassy, and, if need be, would break down the gate and door, Don Guerau gave orders that Captain Rymingtowne should be stabbed and thrown into the river. That is what moved Burghley's contempt; but he was, after all, very English. Morality apart, it seems to have been the wisest thing to do. For if Captain Rymingtowne had been discovered wounded in the Embassy, the ambassador's complicity in the plot and apprehension of wrath to come must have been patent, while a dead body found in the river could prove nothing. But the fellows sent to do the deed found, as you anticipate, no Captain Rymingtowne to murder. Their leader, who was a man of resource and feared that he would be blamed for the escape, thought it best to report to Don Guerau that they had done as they were bidden. Then, confident that he had abolished the chief witness against him, Don Guerau gave orders to let the Yeomen in. With a grim satisfaction, I conceive, he waited while they searched, and haughtily, disdainfully, breathing threats of his master's vengeance, he let himself be conducted to Whitehall.

CHAPTER XXXII

CAPTAIN RYMINGTOWNE GOES TO COURT

CAPTAIN RYMINGTOWNE was there before him. You conceive the disgust of Burghley's servants—for my lord was of austere manners—when a creature which, so far as it was distinctly like anything, seemed to be a herd woman or a tavern drudge,

demanded instant speech of their master. They answered with reproachful rebukes, and as the creature grew insistent—it was a religious household—with exhortations. At last, reluctantly, they fetched an irritated secretary.

“A word in your ear, my lad,” quoth Captain Rymingtowne, and in a whisper revealed so much that the supercilious young man’s knees were loosened. Recovering himself he fled, and with little more delay Captain Rymingtowne was conducted to Burghley’s presence.

As he went he plucked the kerchief from his head; but I suppose he looked, with his bandage and his petticoats and his bare legs, none the more rational for that. It was doubtless fortunate that the squire of Assynton sat with Burghley waiting the issue of that expedition to the ambassador’s. After a surprised glance at the amazing creature who grinned upon him, Burghley turned to Mr. Rymingtowne.

“Is this your man, sir?”

But Mr. Rymingtowne was already on his feet holding out his hand.

“Here’s a happy issue, sir,” he said heartily. “As you see, my lord, this is my man.”

“Thank you for that,” quoth Captain Rymingtowne, gripping hard.

“So.” Burghley tapped on the table. “Well, sir, you are the man, then, who hath been practising piracy against Spain?”

Captain Rymingtowne straightened himself.

“If we be to begin calling names, there’s some I can lay my tongue to.”

Burghley looked at him sourly. He had no kindness for sea captains who made private wars. He was never grateful to amateurs who meddled with high policy. But at this moment the secretary came in a hurry to whisper that the Queen desired my lord’s presence and Mr. Rymingtowne’s. Mr. Rymingtowne smiled.

“Shall we take him with us?”—and he nodded at the quaint creature in petticoats.

Burghley frowned as he gathered his papers, but once outside the door said severely:

“For what I know, she may command him.” He could never make his Queen as correct as he desired.

And the truth is that in a little while an usher in the royal livery summoned Captain Rymingtowne. Whether Queen

Elizabeth was more curious about the man himself or his adventures, or Burghley's brief censorious account of his petticoats, we need not debate; for her taste, which liked strong flavours in everything except wine, would relish all these matters; and it is certain that when she beheld his big broken head, and his unfeminine shape in stomacher and shirt, and his bare masculine legs at the bottom thereof, she broke out laughing, with a—

"God's body! God's body, here's a chimera! A horrid monster i' sooth! Confess, my lord, he made you quake in your modest shoes!" She jerked her royal elbow at Burghley. Leicester, the popinjay, and her bluff cousin, old Hunsdown, joined in her laughter. Mr. Rymingtonne allowed himself to smile. Burghley coughed, and the Puritan Walsingham looked down his nose. "Well, sirrah, what have you been at that you look so wanton?" She chuckled, and flung herself back—like a man for all her jewelled hair and ruff and farthingale.

Then Captain Rymingtonne said:

"Please, your Majesty, knocked o' the head by the Spanish ambassador's bullies, and locked up in his house without my breeches. But that's beginning at the end."

"Your head's clear enough, good fellow. Begin where you will, o' God's name!"

So Captain Rymingtonne told of those who came aboard his ship at Genoa, how he was fired upon at Cadiz, and how he had taken from the baggage of Annibale Gaddi the letters which betrayed the plot.

"The letters"—Burghley took him up—"being these? You will swear to them, sir?"—and they were passed across the table.

Captain Rymingtonne shuffled them. He remembered Isabella de Espes and her magic plea for Norfolk as her lover. To be sure, he had promised her nothing. He could not conceive that it would be anything but a happy deliverance for her if Norfolk went to the block. And yet he owed her what he could do. He looked at the letters, and gave them all back save one.

"I'll swear to those," said he; "but, as touching this paper——" He hesitated, folding it one way and another.

Burghley checked them in a hurry, and looked up.

"That—that is the chief piece against my lord of Norfolk."

"How now?" the Queen cried. "What's Norfolk to you, sirrah?"

Captain Rymingtowne shrugged his shoulders.

"Naught and less. But maybe 'tis some use that I be here alive to swear to my letters."

"Od's heart!" The Queen laughed. "I'll thank thee for not dying till I had a sight of thee in thy petticoats. What then?"

"A word in your private ear, ma'am."

Leicester cried out "Insolence!" and there was a mutter of reproof.

But the Queen rose, laughing.

"Well, sir, walk apart in the window; but speak modestly; I am but a maid."

So into the curtained embrasure they went, and Captain Rymingtowne told of Isabella and how she pled and how she saved him; and the Queen clapped her hand on his shoulder, and swore:

"God's body, a brave tale!" and laughed, and turned to Burghley. "I did not know that Don Guerau had a daughter."

"She came from Spain last week, madame."

"Last week, sirrah!" the Queen echoed, turning again to Captain Rymingtowne. "Then if my lord of Norfolk hath won her maiden heart he is something brisker than ever I thought him. Go to, I'll swear she hath never seen him!"

"I do not understand then," said Captain Rymingtowne stolidly.

"Why, sir, then you know little of women but their petticoats. And, God guide us, not much of them neither! Did you ever hear tell that a girl will play on a man to see what stuff there is in him? Out on you for a cold fellow! I'll not say but the wench had a notion of saving the knave for her father's sake. But I'll swear she thought most of making you caper. So now, sirrah, the letter." Captain Rymingtowne surrendered it something abashed. "And now, since you prove so little right to them, we must have you out of those petticoats."

She clapped her hands and dismissed him to an usher, who gave him to some of the Chamberlain's men.

Now while Captain Rymingtowne was getting into breeches, Don Guerau was brought to Whitehall and the Queen's cabinet. He entered with an explosion. The majesty of Spain was outraged. His person and his house, sacred by all laws human and divine, had suffered violence. Spain would know how to avenge him.

The Queen looked at Burghley, who said:

"To which, sir, you well know the answer: that you have abused the right of your office. I shall briefly show it to your confusion. But first I accuse you of violence to the Queen's liegeman, Captain Rymingtowne."

"The pirate?" said Don Guerau coldly. "Is he back in England? Then I advise you to take order that he make swift acquaintance with the hangman. For my master will be satisfied with no less."

"Satisfied!" Burghley sneered. "Ay, your good faith craves satisfaction."

But the Queen broke out:

"Hangman, quotha! And who made you hangman in England, sirrah?"

Don Guerau drew himself up.

"Your dignity, madame, is in your own hand. You will not so diminish my master's."

"Why, I suppose your house knows nothing of Captain Rymingtowne?" said Burghley.

"You had best ask your own guardsmen, my lord."

"Ay, ay. They found nothing, I hear. We must look for him elsewhere. You cannot tell us where to seek?"

"My lord, I should demean myself to answer your insults."

"You have taken no order about Captain Rymingtowne?" Burghley insisted.

"My lord, I leave your own knaves to you."

And then the Queen said:

"Bring the good captain."

Don Guerau, for all his years of diplomacy, was visibly startled. After a moment he put on an air of careless defiance, but there was effort in it. Captain Rymingtowne came in. He was now inside a sedate doublet and hose, and the bandage had gone from his head. He made his best bow, which was, I conceive, not beautiful.

"Here is your man, sir," the Queen cried. "Will you brazen it more? Did you never seek to murder him? Did you never threaten him with death if he would not keep your plots secret? God's death, speak truth at last!"

Don Guerau, who believed Captain Rymingtowne safe in the Thames, who could not be sure whether this was the man or a sham, was in some difficulty. But he did well enough.

"If this be the pirate," he said coldly, "I claim justice on him."

For your Majesty's words, I know not what wild tale you are cheated with."

"Justice!" the Queen thundered. "Ay, sir, you shall have justice before all Christendom. Back to your house, and there you rest under guard till we have taken order with your hellish plots. See to it, my lord. Get you gone, sir."

"My master, madame, will know how to answer this."

"By God, it will tax his wits!" the Queen said.

With a shrug for her coarse manners, Don Guerau went his way.

For a moment the Queen beat on the table, frowning; then with a grim smile she looked up at Captain Rymingtowne.

"Well, sirrah, you have managed your business prettily. Here be storms to uphold you in your piracies."

"By your good leave, ma'am," said Captain Rymingtowne, "there is no piracy to it, for I never put a hand to their treasure ships till I found them plotting bloody murder against you."

"Ay, you're a saint," she laughed. "And how much Spanish gold is there aboard your ship in Bristol?"

"I'll be blithe to give account to your officers, ma'am."

"Nay, if we're to make accounts with you, God help us!" she cried in high good humour. "I suppose they understood each other very well. There was a certain tiara of emeralds which came afterwards to her royal head. Not without gossip. Well, go to—away with your for a rogue! We must go into these mysteries of yours." She tapped the letters.

Then Mr. Rymingtowne took Captain Rymingtowne to find his daughter Mary. For she had chosen to come to Court with that hurrying company of his. What made her do it I do not find anywhere explained. But it seems that when Captain Rymingtowne came to her in a corner of the hall, he found her alone and pale and anxious-eyed, and his coming made her start up and sink down again trembling.

"Good morrow to you," said Captain Rymingtowne; and at that she began to laugh queerly.

"To be sure," said a gay voice behind them—"you do look better in breeches." Captain Rymingtowne jumped round to see Isabella de Espes. "God speed you, sir," said she with a curtsy. "So that"—she nodded her round head at Mistress Rymingtowne—"that is why you were so cold to me. I'll not say but you have taste. Madame, give you joy of him. He is a faithful soul—for a man. Or my small self is not long enough temptation. Who knows? For by what I hear Teresa had

more luck with him. And now good-night to you. They tell me I must be locked up with my father—poor gentleman!" Away she flitted, but turned again to whisper in Mary's ear: "My dear, it's a mule to drive. But try coaxing."

But Captain Rymingtowne found that Mary's eyes looked at him with a difference. He found it hard to explain to her that her suspicions did him wrong.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE BEST OF THREE

MARY RYMINGTOWNE was giving her father continual pain. He possessed no ear for music.

Through all her completed twenty-two years of life this deficiency had never bred trouble between them. She early discovered that she had a sweet, small voice, and enjoyed using it, but not with such passion that she could not restrain herself when her father was near. (All her passions, indeed, were austere controlled.) On the other side, it seems that he learnt to listen calmly and even with content when she sang grave things, so long as she was on the other side of a wall or the garden. He admitted pleasure in and professed to remember the tunes of a few Latin hymns.

But now she was singing all day and everywhere. Or when she was not singing she was rushing and boisterous and entertaining half Berkshire at Assynton. Mr. Rymingtowne, who loved, next to his daughter, astronomy and peace, and his own kind not a jot more than a Christian must, was distracted. But he preferred company to her singing. For that had become flamboyantly jovial. You conceive him starting with a petulant exclamation from his map of the stars, when after two amorous ditties had risen out of the rose pleasaunce, he heard this come defiantly:

By a bank as I lay
Musing myself alone,
Hey ho!
A birde's voice
Did me rejoice,
Singing before the day.
And, methought, in her lay,
She said, 'Winter was past!'
Hey ho! Dan dyry cum dan.

Mr. Rymingtowne, aware that he would not be able to think till there was an end of this, walked to the window and looked out cynically upon the dawn-cloud beauty of his apple orchard.

Then he made the sound which is written "Pshaw!" A young fellow was coming through the trees, and Mr. Rymingtowne had no illusions as to whom he came to see. There was nothing to object to in Arthur Gower, a youth well born, well endowed, and without reproach among women or men. But Mary was still singing:

Awake, therefore, young men!

All ye that Lovers be!

Hey ho!

This month of May,

So fresh, so gay!

So fair be field or hill:

Doth flourish every Jill:

Great joy it is to see!

Hey ho! Dan dyry cum dan!

"Pshaw!" said Mr. Rymingtowne. It was wholly inconvenient that any gentleman of ambition should find such music on his daughter's lips.

He acquitted her of intention. And then was not sure of what he could acquit her. He seemed of late to have lost her nature. Once he had been as sure of her as of his firm set self; sure that she was in the very heart sincere, earnest, and critical, a woman born to feel deeply or to feel nothing, for a life of great passion and genial contempt. And behold she was developed into something like a common Court lady, greedy of noise and show, happy in making men bold with her, and being bold with men.

I do not suppose that Mary Rymingtowne could have explained herself. I am sure that to her father she never tried. But with the amassed wisdom of the three hundred years since she lived it is not difficult to read her riddle. From the moment when she was first aware of womanhood waking within her she had never been able to free herself from the memory, the vision, of the body and mind of one man—Dick Rymingtowne, shepherd boy and sea captain. There was certainly something of fear in her emotions about him, for she always felt him rough and cunning and fierce. I account her adventure with my Lord Branscombe caused not so much by that decorated person's urgency as by her own desire to find refuge in some man, in

any man, from the grim obsession of her soul. After she failed, after Captain Rymingtowne came down upon her again, he was more tyrannical than ever. She was certainly a woman born to be in earnest. She could not escape from him and herself by inventing some easy fashion of life. The very length of years that he kept her waiting, while he won wealth according to his desire, made her passion stronger, till when he came back in a blaze of glory and danger she was ready to cast herself down before him.

But she was prevented. Not Captain Rymingtowne, not any man of woman born, had the strength to break her pride. It is plain that she would have died rather than yield anything of her life to a man who kept something of himself from her. Less than all of him would be to her mind less than nothing. Any suspicion that she loved him more than he loved her, wanted him more than she was wanted, tormented her into strange transformations to show him and all the world her disdain.

Then it happened that Captain Rymingtowne came back amid a whole army of circumstances and rumours hinting him the hero of many ladies. To the tender devotion of one, it was certain, he owed his escape from the trap of the Spanish ambassador. Doubtless the poor woman was not to blame. She carried it off well and gaily. But Captain Rymingtowne had found her very useful, and Captain Rymingtowne was shy of talking about her. And not only of talk about her. There was her cousin. Perhaps it was to slur over herself that the lady hinted of Captain Rymingtowne being something more than friends with cousin Teresa. But some adventure had involved him and Madame Teresa, and what it was he could not find time to tell. And Mistress Teresa was not the end of it either. One might neglect the strange things rumour had to say of his passages with Julia Gonzaga. But how should a girl answer when rumour asked what the woman was doing aboard his ship at Cadiz, the woman whose death, so rumour said, set him fighting Spain in a passion of revenge?

Captain Rymingtowne was a man, as you know, singularly aloof from casual amours. It can never have occurred to him that his lady of Assynton would think him other, but Mary Rymingtowne, though even then she knew the soul of him through and through, did not know that she knew it, and was shamefully aware that of his ways and his habits and five years of his life she knew almost nothing. Therefore she half believed in these

fabled romances. Moreover—and if it was not as black a sin it was more irritating—Captain Rymingtowne showed no zeal in wooing. That he should have expected her at his command to wait him faithfully without a word, year in year out, till he chose to come and take her, was oddly exciting indeed, but only to be borne if, when he came at last, he was on fire for her. But he seemed to be only on fire for his money. She was in London to meet him, and he was so busy with the Queen and the Lords of Council that he had hardly moments to spare for her. She went back to Assynton, and, instead of pursuing her, he was at Bristol about his ship and the Spanish treasure aboard her, and to and fro between Bristol and London through month after month.

Such are the mistakes of the mind conscious of its own rectitude.

So Mary Rymingtowne found it necessary to prove to all the world and herself that she was in the highest spirits; that all she wanted of life was a rush of fine shows and noisy laughter; and she cared for no man on earth enough to be serious a moment; that she was ready to play with any man who had looks and brains and would be enticed to play with her. I do not defend her. I will believe, if you like, that there were minutes or more when she despised herself bitterly, and I'll not say when she was wrong. This is what she did and why she did it, and her father was distracted.

But Mr. Arthur Gower, to his intimates, boasted of her as a splendid creature of delight, a golden girl, and courted her with all his looks, which were good, and all his graces, which were showy, and all his wits, which were well enough for a lad born to fortune. He was, in fine, a pleasant fellow, outside and in, with a well-turned leg and a good pair of shoulders, and a cold blue eye, which laughed at every one but himself, and a little beard, of which he was as proud as his other endowments. Perhaps with as good reason. So he served Mary Rymingtowne's purpose excellently well.

Into the rose pleasaunce he came smiling, and Mary laughed and made him a curtesy so low and long that she seemed to be sitting in the midst of a sea of apple-green skirts. He bowed again and melodiously echoed her own song:

So fresh, so gay
So fair be field or hill:
Doth flourish every Jill:
Great joy it is to see!
Hey ho! Dan dyry cum dan.

“ ‘Hath flourished every Jill,’ indeed. ‘Great joy it is to see.’ ”

“Fie, sir! you are too bold—for a stranger.” She gave him a look of mocking invitation.

“A stranger, am I?” He took her hand with an air of affectionate right. “Why, then, who is nearer?”

“Whoever is dearer, good sir,” said she.

“I do not believe in him,” said Arthur Gower complacently. “If I did, some one must needs bleed for it.”

“Oh!” She made a teasing mouth. “Here be terrors! And, prithee, my good lord, by what right should you go blood-letting for my glory?”

“Not for your glory,” quoth he, “but for my ambitions, which are there.” He touched her breast lightly.

“Ambitions!” She pulled her face awry. “There’s a man’s word! But by your leave, if you have forgot my hand, I have not.” With which she took it away from him.

“Nor I neither. I was but proclaiming myself to my realm.” She shook her head.

“You are no more than a pretender. And I give you surety there is no part of me which takes your part.”

“What, none, Mary?”

He put his hand on her shoulder, and looked down into her eyes with some passion, I believe—no doubt with something of command; but she saw also a genial condescension, such as is natural from an able young gentleman to a woman.

“My modest thanks for your favours, sir,” she laughed. “I profess you are very useful to ride with—which, if I remember, is why you are here.”

“It is the excuse,” Mr. Gower smiled, and let her go.

You conceive him thinking that it was best to humour the pretty creature’s coyness; which, to be sure, was very proper in her. She ought to be something afraid of him.

“Well, let us ride, then. The time will go quicker.”

With a laugh she turned from him and caught up her skirt and ran. It was a comely sight, but Mr. Gower followed soberly. He doubted if her last phrase was quite respectful.

She led him, then, a gallop down the avenue of beeches. Mr. Gower recovered his spirits. He liked to see the pretty creature showing her strength. I suppose if she had not held her own on horseback he would have cared nothing about her. He had a wholesome taste.

As they came to the swell of the downs and reined in to a walk,

they were met by another horseman. He plainly affected the bizarre as earnestly as Arthur Gower the perfect courtier. He was all in black, save for a blazing scarlet feather. His horse was a black Arab, with its mane tied and twisted into love-locks by scarlet ribbons. His black beard had a curl at the point, which succeeded very well in looking artificial. He was as lean as a line by nature, and his narrow face, perhaps not by nature, was dead white. You recognize again my Lord Branscombe.

It had taken my lord a long while to find his way back to Berkshire. When first he ran away to France, he conceived that England was closed against him for ever. He could not easily bring himself to believe that Council and Queen had never heard of his important treasons, that no one in England cared what he was doing or where he did it, that he was in fine wholly insignificant. When that humiliating truth was forced upon him, his emotions were complex. He experienced a grateful relief from fear. He had been continually conceiving it possible that Elizabeth's vengeance might strike at him in Paris, if not at his life, at his opulence, at his estates and the revenues which filtered to his exile. He would have been very glad to feel safe if he had not felt ashamed of being ridiculous. He imagined three counties at the least laughing at him. He was consumed with spite against Captain Rymingtonne, who had made a fool of him, and the girl who had watched the process. So when he did come back to England he avoided for a long while the home of his ancestors and all the west country. He was not easily convinced that Berkshire and Wiltshire neither laughed at him nor thought of him. I suppose he never did believe that Captain Rymingtonne had kept the tale to himself. My Lord Branscombe was not constructed to imagine a man who could tell of another's folly and cowardice neglecting his chance. When at last he did come back, it was Captain Rymingtonne's return that brought him. It was the hope of an occasion to revenge himself on the coarse sea captain and that blowsy girl of his. A subtle fellow—and my Lord Branscombe believed himself the most subtle of all Italianate gentlemen—could surely do the pair some damage, and there would be most savour to it when they were hot for each other's arms. So he came back to his house at Barbury; and to convince the honest squires about him that he was no laughing matter, he affected great state and an awful iniquity. They seem to have thought him a tiresome fool.

In this character of a voluptuary from the devil he caracoled up to Mary and her gallant.

"Good morrow to youth and innocence," said he, and smiled as satanically as he was able.

Mary Rymingtowne betrayed some natural surprise, which my lord construed as alarm and was well pleased.

"Good morrow, old gentleman," Arthur Gower laughed; and then in loud confidence to Mary: "Faith, it's the oldest lad of twenty-five ever I saw." Mary smiled nervously.

"I like your taste in men, madame," said Branscombe, "for there's the simplest baby that ever grew a beard. But will you ever rear him? Well, perhaps it's best he should die before he can talk. So shall you be spared disappointment."

"Nay, how can there be disappointment in a world which contains my Lord Branscombe?" Mary smiled.

"Who could never cheat expectation by holding his tongue two minutes. A comfortable noise, faith, he is—like music at dinner. You mark none of it, yet you miss it when it is not there."

"*Edepol!* The child hath ambitions after wit!" quoth Branscombe. "May the Muses have pity on him! But I do give you joy of your new plaything, madame. For he'll never bite nor scratch like the old one, who, indeed, is now leaving his marks on other pretty fools." Mary looked haughtily away, but her cheeks were red. My lord shrugged his shoulders. "What would you? They are mutable, these cubs, and infinitely greedy. You should not expect that they will always feed from the same platter."

Arthur conceived it his honourable duty to intervene.

"My lord, you are well enough in cap and bells. When you try to be subtler than my lady's fool should be, you grow tiresome."

"Dear lad!" said Branscombe affectionately. "And did you think you were madame's first? I suppose so. Even as she conceived she must be first and last with her beery sea captain. *Hercle!* If there be a duller thing than man, it is certainly woman. Or how should the hulking mariner ever find so many doxies to take his tarry hand? But I remember once in Rome——"

Mary made an exclamation.

"And you remember once in Berkshire how Captain Ryming-

towne made a fool of you. Oh, I know it gave him no trouble, my lord. But I have no liking for your revenge."

Branscombe showed his teeth.

"Poor girl!" he said, with a malicious sigh. "I was afraid that you still had hopes of your clumsy Ulysses. But I do not advise you to be as faithful as Penelope. For your hero has found too many Circes abroad and at home. Though to be sure, he needed none to turn him into a hog."

Here Arthur rode round from Mary's left hand and tapped my lord on the shoulder with his whip.

"It's not in my recollection that Mistress Rymingtowne bade you be of her company."

"Oh, my dear lad!" Branscombe laughed. "I know I am out of date. I am a flame of yesteryear. But what though? It is a little amusing to come watch the new flame languish. You are as comical as anything I know in this dull world. But, *pardon, mon bel ami*, I have now had enough of you." He spurred his horse, and rode ahead; then, turning in the saddle, called: "Be of good cheer, mistress. The mariner may come back to you when he is tired."

It would certainly be unjust to Arthur Gower if there were no record that he nearly went galloping after my lord; perhaps if he had, you would like him better. But he was, according to his lights, the perfect courtier, and it was impossible for him to be so natural as to brawl in a woman's presence, even for the chastening of a man who was impudent to her.

So he made her a bow, and said:

"A thousand pardons, madame. I am ashamed that you should be troubled by so base a fellow. But be sure that I will take order with him. He shall be taught that he offends you at peril of his life. I entreat you, think of him no more; it's a dog which hath learnt all the ill-breeding of France and Italy, yet lost none of his native English."

"I do not think of him," she said. But she was still flushed and her bosom restless. "Will you challenge him?"

"It is not my habit to turn the other cheek to impudence," he said magnificently.

She drew a long breath. She made him no answer. After a while he looked at her and saw a tear on her cheek.

"Nay, faith, madame," he cried, "you wrong yourself to let him have power to wound you. What's he to you or——" He made a gesture of disdain.

She stared and looked at him quickly.

"Or?" she repeated. "You said 'or,' Mr. Gower?"

"Why, then—or this boor of his dull taunts. To be sure they are well matched—a tedious buffoon and a boor who sells the plots of his light o' loves and——"

"I do not think you know the gentleman, Mr. Gower."

Mr. Gower laughed.

"Why, God ha' mercy, no! A shepherd boy turned mariner, who used one woman to help him to piracies and another to sell plots. I know no more of him than all the world knows. He is something beneath us, I think." And he cocked his hat.

"Let us go home," Mary said.

On the way Gower, who piqued himself on his knowledge of women, was careful to abstain from any show of wooing. He was very witty and fanciful, and he compelled her often to laughter, and felt wholly satisfied.

But when they came to the door of Assynton Manor and Mr. Rymingtowne walked out to receive them, he had his hand on the shoulder of the sea captain. The two on horseback exhibited emotions. Mary's face was white. Arthur Gower became as stiff and still as a cavalier of bronze.

The sea captain stared, wholly impassive, at them both. Only Mr. Rymingtowne seemed happy.

"I think you do not know Mr. Gower, Dick. You have heard the fame of our Berkshire High Admiral, Gower. I must procure you his better acquaintance. Ride over and dine with us on a day next week."

The sea captain nodded at Mr. Gower. Mr. Gower made a salute of coldest state. He was horrified at Mr. Rymingtowne's awkwardness. To present him—a Gower of Dancey, him, a courtier of the finest gold—to this boor of a pirate as a humble aspirant for acquaintance was intolerable, almost incredible. And in conclusion a hint to stay away for a week!

"You do me too much honour, sir," he said in his most wounding manner. "Madame, your faithful servant. Mr. Rymingtowne, I thank you." His bows were nicely graduated. "Sir," he touched his hat to the sea captain and rode off.

Mary Rymingtowne slipped to the ground, and with an "I give you good day, sir," into the house.

The sea captain turned on his heel and followed her close. Mr. Rymingtowne, smiling in his white beard, lounged away after Mary's horse and groom. By the foot of the stairs the sea

captain came up with Mary, and put his hand on her shoulder from behind, and stopped and pulled her round. She gazed a moment fierce and surprised. Then he took her in his arms.

She was unyielding, but she did not struggle. Her face was cold and hard.

"This is base, sir," she said. "I must needs tell my father to forbid you my presence."

Dick laughed.

"Have words been for much 'twixt you and me?" and he kissed her.

At that, with the sudden strength of rage she forced herself away and stood panting out:

"Go, go! You are loathsome."

"To be sure, I knew you were not as cold as you made believe," said Dick.

"Oh! . . ." She struggled with feelings that could not be spoken. "How you make me despise you!" She turned from him quivering, and had her foot on the stair again when he caught her wrist.

"Despise me, do you?" he said. "That's new. And why, if you please?"

"Why?" she began to laugh contempt and excitement. "Oh, yes, you need to ask! Why should I not be grateful to be a toy for you, a fool, a dupe? What other use is a woman to you?"

The sea captain was unabashed.

"Well, I ha' known you duped by other men; and you are not so wise as you might be yet. But I'm always for opening your eyes; and you know it, my girl."

"Oh, you are not to be borne!" she cried, and, indeed, his manner did not mitigate what he said. "I tell you, sir, your insolence may serve you with others, but I——"

"Others?" he took her up sharply—"others? Ay, now we come to it. Who talks of others, my girl?"

She was ashamed of herself. She was miserably aware that she had lost her dignity. So she grew the more angry and went deeper in the mire.

"Yes, indeed, you should be lofty, you should put me to question. Do you forget the Spanish woman in London? Do you think I hear nothing, guess nothing? And you—you dare come back now to make me a mock!"

"Ay, ay," said Captain Rymingtonne. "There's them that

talks, is there? But, by God! who bade you listen? Look you, my girl: no woman's the worse for me. What be you that I should have to tell you so? And for them that have been talking—good day to you!”

For a moment she could hardly believe that he was gone. He left her, as you may conceive, in a tumult of emotions. She hated him, of course, and hated herself more. She repeated, as though it were a charm, that he was a rogue and a boor, and all the while raged against him for so leaving her. She was full of fears, and strange, thrilling hopes of delight. And so she hid herself from her father, and especially her maid.

When the maid was sent by her father to ask if she was to be seen at supper, she was sufficiently composed to wash her face and meet him. He began very amiably; said that he was glad to have Diccon safe back in Berkshire, and with that obeisance to convention diverged from the sea captain as from a creature indifferent, and began to talk of trout and lambs. On these matters Mary was sufficiently at ease, and so she ate more than she had imagined possible. It was not till she had made an end that Mr. Rymingtonne allowed himself to embarrass her.

“I thought you would have kept Master Dick to supper,” he said, carelessly blind to the blush that overwhelmed her. “Well, perhaps I hoped. A good fellow.”

In a hurry Mary contrived to say:

“I am sure I could neither make him stay nor go.”

It was only by a moment's silence and lifted eyebrows that her father answered that. Then he appeared to meditate aloud:

“To be sure, he is not a man for young tastes, which like sweetness. And when a man lets them see he hath a mind for crafty contrivance and the base material, they are apt to think him a monstrous villain. For my part, I do more mistrust your chevalier *sans reproche*, your very honourable gentleman, your woman immaculate, who may have anything behind the fair outside—or nothing. At least there's strength in a man who's not afraid to show you his sinnership. And as life goes he is likely to be less meanly a sinner than the rest of us.” He broke off and sipped his watered wine. “Poor Diccon! Here am I slicing his soul up, who have not half the sincerity of him. Faith, it's a man to say prayers for! The power of life in him makes you live a world more ardently”—Mr. Rymingtonne chuckled gently—“as comical as he is.”

Mary, who had been looking at her plate with eyes that glowed

through a mist, started, and "Comical?" she said sharply. "I am sure I never found him comical at all."

"The dear lad is so fond of trying for a shudder," Mr. Rymingtowne explained. "It's a silly child after all, God bless him!"

"Silly!" said Mary with indignation. "I am sure he is anything but that."

"In the way of sweet innocence, I mean," said Mr. Rymingtowne. "I think it is chiefly why I like him."

"You will be talking," Mary cried, and rose. Mr. Rymingtowne held the door for her with humility. When he came back to his wine he was much amused.

CHAPTER XXXIV

CAPTAIN RYMINGTOWNE GOES TO SCHOOL

I SEE in the ensuing actions of the sea captain a large divergence from his habitual reasonable condition. It is possible that he was equally aware of this; that his extravagant heroics were precisely calculated for the edification of Mary Rymingtowne. But I think not. He was, I conceive, in a great passion. The stress of waiting, now the time of waiting was near an end, fretted his placid reason away. For his own comfort he was compelled to something sudden and violent. In fine, he wanted to make a fool of himself.

There was a tavern in Whitbury of reputation, a tavern much used by the gentry from twelve miles round, and hardly civil to other creatures. On the next day after dinner Captain Rymingtowne rode into its courtyard and dismounted and climbed to the great room over the archway, where a round dozen young gentlemen of importance were being witty over their wine.

He was, of course, recognized. Half England was then talking of him, and in his own vale of Assynton and thereabout they talked of little else; of his very base birth, of his fame for folly when he was a shepherd boy, of his incredible exploits at sea, and how marvellous or how villainous it was that he should come home richer than all the county.

He was not greeted. Famous, infamous or unknown, rich or poor, he had no right in that tavern till he was bidden. If he did not know as much, his very ignorance proved him unfit for its

august society. But he was not insulted. It is, perhaps, conceivable that the noble young gentlemen had some hesitation in quarrelling with a man who had so much wealth behind him. But we may be kind and find the reason of their self-restraint in his known high favour at Court.

So no one said anything to Captain Rymingtonne, good or bad. He looked at his leisure round the room with its neat devices in wainscot and hose, its decoration of fragrant boughs and herbs and beards and wine, and picked out his man. Arthur Gower sat a little apart from the rest with another as well dressed as himself, his friend Walter Mill, of Walford. He was waiting for my Lord Branscombe. To his amazement Captain Rymingtonne marched up to him and said:

"At your service, Mr. Arthur Gower."

Gower looked him over with cool contempt.

"I have nothing for you, sir," and turned in his chair.

"What, nothing to my face? Then you have too much behind my back."

Gower turned again.

"Is it possible that you dare to fix some quarrel upon me?"

"You began the quarrel, my lad—in the dark, and me not there. Will you face it out, or ask pardon?"

Gower looked at his friend and laughed.

"Sure, the fellow is in wine."

Mr. Mill shrugged.

"Bid him go back to his farmyard."

Captain Rymingtonne took a step forward, and at his side a man—Roger Evesham, of Roding St. Neots—stood up. For the sea captain's angular face was flushed and fierce, and there was menace in the pose of his heavy frame, and Mr. Evesham, who seems to have had the quickest mind in the room, apprehended a brawl. But it did not then come.

"You ha' spoke ill of me behind my back, Mr. Arthur Gower. Will you make it good?"

Gower laughed at him.

"So! Then I'll tell you you lied. Can you understand that, my lad?"

Gower sprang to his feet.

"It is well for you you are but a boor, sirrah. Else I would teach you with my sword what you shall learn of a horsewhip."

Captain Rymingtonne laughed.

"My pretty lad, I should flay the flesh off you at that game,"

and it seems that Mr. Evesham and some others smiled, for the sea captain was so much the larger man.

Nothing was more likely to annoy Arthur Gower. He flushed and said sharply:

"Since you will be punished, you shall, sir. I have at the moment another affair. My friend shall wait on you. Where are you to be found?"

"Wait, wait!" Captain Rymingtowne sneered. "I ha' no mind to wait, my lad!"

"Well crowed, rooster!" said a mocking voice behind them.

"To it again, bantam!"

The two angry men started round to see Lord Branscombe's feebly satanic smile.

"By your leave, sir," said Arthur Gower sharply, and strode up to him. "I have been waiting for you, my lord."

But Captain Rymingtowne came close behind him.

"*Merci, monsieur!*" Branscombe laughed. "'Tis as pretty a cockfight as ever I saw. But why not have your hen to cluck over it?"

"Enough of your wit, my lord," Gower began; but Captain Rymingtowne thrust in front of him and knocked my lord down.

In Branscombe's defence, it is to be said that he had never felt a blow in all his life—even from nurse or tutor or parent. He was the only son of his mother. But he lay dazed while over him Captain Rymingtowne said:

"I saved you a hanging once. The more fool me. Get up, you dog, and let me stick you."

Slowly Branscombe lifted himself up. He addressed the room.

"You keep strange company, gentlemen. Here's one who has strayed from the stables. I'll call my grooms to him and relieve you."

The sea captain caught him as he turned away.

"Will you fight, you rogue?"

Branscombe fumbled in his pocket and pulled out a crown.

"Prithee, good fellow, buy thyself a pint and be gone. I had forgot I owed it thee."

He looked round the room laughing nervously, but saw no support.

Captain Rymingtowne flung him away, so that he fell against the table.

"You ha' had your chance, my lord coward, and it was too

good for you. If ever you meet me again I'll handle you as I ha' handled you this day."

"I'll provide my grooms stout whips," Branscombe cried.

"Nay, my dear, you'll run away to France again," Captain Rymingtowne grinned. "Unless there's another fellow there waiting to thrash you."

Branscombe made for the door, but Arthur Gower pursued him.

"My affair is not so answered, my lord."

Branscombe thrust him petulantly away.

"I do not fight boors and boys; nor even a gentleman for such a woman as your lean hen. Go to; you may make her cackle all day long for what I care."

So gallantly he plunged out, and if you care to know, back to France he went, where one of Mayenne's Lorrainers, in a quarrel about the price of a silver crucifix—Branscombe was close with his money—flung him into the Seine and shot him as he came to the surface.

Captain Rymingtowne and Arthur Gower were face to face again.

"Now, sir—now," Gower cried, "since you have so mishandled my affair, I am for you heartily."

"That's as may be," said Captain Rymingtowne slowly. "I did not know that fool was still hereabout and venomous. Maybe it's he which miscalled me. If you do tell me you ha' done me no wrong, I'll believe you and be satisfied."

Gower laughed fiercely.

"Oh, you'll believe me! I admire your impudence. Come, sir, it seems you are not so ready when a brawl will not end the matter. But you shall not so escape your punishment."

Captain Rymingtowne looked down at him and shrugged.

"Come, sir, you need the spur as much as my lord. Come, it's the sword or a whip for you."

"You are but a fool, my lad," said Captain Rymingtowne. "Have with you!"

"Walter!" Gower called to Mr. Mill, who came forward. "Who's your friend, sir?"

"Friend! I ha' no friends here," said the sea captain. "What need of friends? There's room for a bout in the courtyard, and the company can see fair."

Gower and Mr. Mill looked at each other with amused contempt for him.

"It's easy to see the gentleman is something out of his vocation," said Mr. Mill.

Then Mr. Evesham finished his wine and said:

"For God's sake do not you go about to be witty, Walter, or we shall all be in tears. I will stand Captain Rymingtowne's friend, if he will so honour me," and he bowed, and Captain Rymingtowne nodded at him.

There was some amazement. Mr. Evesham carried the weight of a man practised in high affairs and the world. He had been in Paris with Walsingham and at Madrid with Cobham. It is not unkind to suppose that he was willing to stand well with a man who stood well with the Queen. But also he must have been a good fellow, and his support says something for Captain Rymingtowne's odd conduct in the affair. He was as good a judge as you or I.

Down to the courtyard they went, and the two stripped to their shirts and the swords were crossed. I suppose that Gower had the polish of French masters. Captain Rymingtowne, who had fought many a rough fight with various weapons, was certainly never a master of sword play. In a moment Gower had him through the arm, and the seconds struck up the blades.

"I think that suffices, Mr. Mill," said Evesham, and Mill turned to Arthur Gower with a question on his lips.

But Gower cried out:

"This is not to end in a scratch, sir. Stand aside! There is too much between us. One of us must down."

"I resent your conduct, sir. Speak through your friend," said Evesham. "You go beyond your right."

"Resent what you will!" Gower cried.

"We demand another bout, Mr. Evesham," said Mill.

Evesham turned to Captain Rymingtowne and spoke apart.

"You have done enough for honour, sir, and ought not to go further with it. All gentlemen will uphold you. I shall refuse to let you now pursue the business."

"God bless you, it's nothing," said Captain Rymingtowne, who was knotting a kerchief round his wound. "Let be. Would I turn my back on a fellow which asked more of me? Let be, I say, Mr. Evesham."

He took up his sword again and thrust.

There was some close work, the two almost body to body, then Gower sprang back, and as Captain Rymingtowne followed,

ran him through. The sea captain thrust again blindly, swayed and fell.

Gower freed his sword and looked down at the bleeding man.

"You have your lesson, sir," he said, and turned away.

Evesham, who was already on his knees and busy about the wound, called after him:

"The affair is not so ended, Mr. Gower."

"At your leisure, Mr. Evesham," said Gower over his shoulder, and found himself in the midst of those who had watched the fight.

One said: "A bad business, Gower," with a shake of the head. Two or three passed him sourly. Another clapped Mill on the shoulder and cried: "You managed it damnably, Walter!" and Mill protested peevishly, "Why, what could I do?"

I believe that till then Gower had no notion of any matter for blame in what he had done. He was of the men who believe their own rights immense, and no punishment too bad for the iniquities of those daring to oppose them. Also, he was logical. He always stood by the letter of the law. In this matter he had been challenged. It was his part to exact what manner of fight he chose. This appeared so clear to him that he was much irritated against those who disapproved. He had a craving after applause and the admiration of the world—an unfortunate taste for a logical man.

He told himself that he would ride to Assynton at once, because it became him, as a lady's lover and appointed champion, to hurry to her side with the tale of how gloriously he had avenged her. There may have been also some suspicion in his mind that he had better be first with his version of the affair. For he was very sensitive to what people said.

So to Assynton he came and asked for Mary Rymingtowne. He was received by her father, who said in a tone of cool surprise, for which Gower struggled to find an adequate answer:

"You came to see my daughter, Mr. Gower?" And, in fact, Gower could find no answer but a bow. "You may trust me with a message," said Mr. Rymingtowne.

"I am afraid I must ask to speak with her, sir."

Mr. Rymingtowne paused long enough to suggest that he was impertinent, and said:

"Then I am afraid I must bid you good day, Mr. Gower."

Mary came into the hall.

Gower bowed very low.

"I fear that I intrude upon you, madame. I came only to tell you that I have done my commission."

"Commission?" Mary cried.

Gower looked from her to her father, advising as plainly as he dared that she should bid the old fellow go. But she only repeated:

"Commission? I do not understand."

Mr. Gower was annoyed at her dullness. To be sure, she ought to have been thinking of him as her knight and champion, and consumed with anxiety for his triumph. He drew himself up and said magnificently:

"My Lord Branscombe will trouble you no more, madame. And for your boorish sea captain, I have given him his lesson, too."

Hot and dusty with hard riding, Mr. Evesham strode in. He saw Gower, gave a sharp, contemptuous laugh, and then, bowing:

"Sir—madame—your pardon. I am perhaps superfluous? Mr. Gower has brought my news?"

By Mary's strained face and her eyes he saw that Gower had told something.

"Mr. Gower informs us," said Mr. Rymingtowne, "that my Lord Branscombe will trouble us no more, and that he has given our sea captain a lesson."

Evesham laughed again.

"A lesson, I presume, in the ways of a bravo, Mr. Gower?"

"I shall know how to answer you, sir," Gower cried, "I am not afraid of you."

Evesham bowed.

"I am glad of it," and turned from him. "Mr. Rymingtowne—madame—I have an errand to you."

Mary cried out in dread.

"Let me tell my story, madame," Gower cried eagerly.

"By your leave we shall understand Mr. Evesham better," said Mr. Rymingtowne.

"I think so," Evesham agreed calmly. "Captain Rymingtowne came to the Rose of Whitbury and accused Mr. Gower of defaming him behind his back. A quarrel arose in which both bore themselves deplorably. My Lord Branscombe entered and mocked at them, referring with contumely to some lady of their common acquaintance. Mr. Gower challenged him. Captain Rymingtowne knocked him down. My lord declined to fight

either, but Captain Rymingtowne so frightened him that I think we shall not long be troubled with him. On his flight, Captain Rymingtowne confessed that Branscombe and not Mr. Gower might be guilty of the offence against him, and offered to compose the quarrel. Mr. Gower demanded that they should fight. Captain Rymingtowne was shortly wounded in his sword arm. Against the custom of honour, Mr. Gower demanded that the fight should go on. He proceeded to deal the wounded man a thrust in the right side. He then insulted him as he lay on the ground. I am happy to advise Mr. Gower that he will find but one opinion among gentlemen on his conduct in the affair."

"You shall answer me this!" Gower cried passionately.

"Gentlemen!" Mr. Rymingtowne spoke with sharp decision. "You will not deny my right to command you in this affair." Gower stared at him. Evesham bowed. "I insist that it shall go no further, and desire you promise me as such."

After a moment Evesham said:

"I much regret your decision, sir, but cannot question it."

"But I do, by heaven!" Gower cried. "Mr. Evesham, you have impugned my honour. I demand a meeting."

"As you see," Evesham shrugged, "I am bound to refuse you."

"Oh, you'll take refuge behind an old man or a woman's skirts, will you? I might have guessed it. I——"

"Pray, sir, go and guess what you will to any who will listen. It is not I who shall be the worse for it."

"My daughter permits you to take your leave, Mr. Gower," said Mr. Rymingtowne, and drew her arm through his. "Will you follow us, Evesham?"

Gower flung away with a laugh that he meant to be mordant. And as he went he heard Mary gasp out:

"Is he dead? Is he dead indeed, Mr. Evesham?"

"I do believe there is no fear of that," Evesham said. "It's a shrewd wound, but I think I have seen a worse healed."

"Ah!" she trembled from head to foot. "I want to go to him, please." She turned to her father in tears. "Please!"

"He lies in my house at Roding," said Mr. Evesham.

Captain Rymingtowne, who had not the least ambition of dying, woke late in the morning and tried to stretch himself, and found that he was too much bandaged, and swore with long

fluency. There was a rustle like a summer wind in the trees, and he saw looking down at him a white face wherein the eyes were sunken and dark and very tender.

"Why, what's the matter?" said Captain Rymingtowne. "Here's woes to be sure! And by the look of you you ha' been up all night. Go get you to bed, my girl. You'm not consoling with that watchful face."

She bit her lip; collapsed on her knees and hid her face on the bed and cried.

"Well, now I've shipped a sea," said Captain Rymingtowne, and wriggled and brought his left hand over, and with a queer limp clumsiness patted her hair.

An hysterical laugh was confided to the bedclothes. Then she looked up deliciously gay through all her weariness and her woes, and:

"I dare you to mock!" she said. "If I have been a fool, so have you! Yes, a fool and a fool and a fool, sir!"

With which she took his head in her arms and covered his lips and his eyes with hers. . . . Then she started away from him, though he tried to hold her in his left arm and grasped after her as she rose.

"You have been cruel all your life," she cried.

Captain Rymingtowne lay back in the bed. "Cruel? Maybe there's some to say so. But not to you, my girl, as you do know."

"To me more than to your enemies," she said.

"That's a riddle, I swear," quoth Captain Rymingtowne.

"It's my life to make you understand it. What have you asked of me yet but fear? What else have you bid me give you?" It is likely that Captain Rymingtowne smiled a little. "Oh, brave, my lord! To prove your strength on me and leave me when you knew me afraid. That was enough, that contented you, God save your soul." She touched his head with her hand awkwardly. "I should never have forgiven you if you had not brought yourself to this pass. I know—I know I was yours before. God help me, I have been yours, ah!—how many years, my lord? But I hated you for it. Yes, sir; I hated you and you have made them talk shame of me all the county and you have brought yourself to very death—and oh, my lord, you are hurt! and" (here she began to laugh as she talked) "and, indeed, you have torn the heart in me and my breast."

Yes, you are a desperate silly thing, after all, and I'll never have you in fear again a moment——"

"Will you not?" said Captain Rymingtowne.

"Nay, not I. You're only a child, my dear, and maybe you'll break my heart with your folly; but you're a child, and it's your right, for I'm a woman, and—and—and so good day to you, grand sea captain!"

"Come you here," said Captain Rymingtowne.

"Not I, boy," she laughed, and sped away.

"Mary!" said Captain Rymingtowne.

The door shut behind her.

Captain Rymingtowne lay back on his pillow.

"There's more to this than I knew, by God!" he said.



